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# The Journal of African Youth Literature





THE JOURNAL OF AFRICAN YOUTH LITERATURE

# PRESERVING AFRICAN YOUTH IDENTITIES

The Journal of African Youth Literature (JAY Lit) is a non-profit initiative providing African youths with a platform to publish their writing. We also publish writing by other individuals that falls under the general theme of African Youth. We want to publish creative writing from across the African continent from Algeria to Zambia, and in all African languages from Amharic to Zulu and everything in between! Submissions for the second issue open on 1 February 2020. Please consult the author guidelines on the website carefully before sending your creative writing.

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Sandesh Baiju for guidance and advice on the long-term vision for the project.



# EDITORIAL FOREWORD

I am very proud to present the first issue of the *Journal of African Youth Literature*. The project has been successful beyond my expectations, and I have received a wonderful response from the authors and from those interested in helping move the project forward. I have been determined that this not be some obscure underground literary twaddle with no real impact. I wanted to work with the authors to create something that resonates with the diverse youth identities of Africa.

The creative writing in the journal shows just how much we share in common while opening us up to new perspectives. That is the thing about literature. It draws us into new ways of experiencing the world. You would never otherwise know what it is to live through many experiences without talented, hard-working writers speaking truth. Because we have striven to be Pan-African, I believe in the pages of this journal every reader will find things both new and familiar.

I imagine highly accomplished writers, such as Shakespeare, making better psychologists than Freud, even at his brightest moments, though writers choose a different mode of therapy. Reflected in Shakespeare's plays and poetry is a deeper understanding of human nature than any shrink you will ever meet. People who write ponder human behaviour. They grapple with people's – and indeed their own – most elusive reasons for doing what they do. We see this brilliantly undertaken in unique ways in the short stories in this issue by young authors **Chaka Molapo**, **Eldinah Akoh**, **Israel Lumile**, **Jacinta Moetlo**, **Nana Esi Donkor** and **Propain Cebekhulu**.

Shakespeare also wielded serious power through his comedies, which expose human shortcomings in a frank but not unsympathetic manner. This kind of talent is evident in the romantic comedy 'Katherine' by **Jonas Chisi**. This was among the first submissions I was privileged to receive and which gave me hope early on for the success of this project.

One of the themes that stand out in the collection is feminism. That is expected from the women, but I did not anticipate the submissions I got from male writers on this theme. I was profoundly moved by 'Blessings' by **Thabo Mathonsi**. Here is a young man who understands the struggles of women and girls in Africa with no reserve, no judgement, and no biases or blinkers whatsoever. I was unable to hold back the tears as I read this compelling story. It was also Thabo's story which encouraged me so much in making this journal a success. I owe it to writers such as him.

In recognition of the emphasis placed on feminist issues by so many of the authors, this issue opens with 'The Agenda is to Rise', a powerful piece of poetry by **Mphae Mashifane**.

We also have poetry by experienced and previously published writers like **Anchal Baniparsadh**, **Chrissie Chinebuah**, **Donell Williams**, **Frank Meintjies**, **Fubaraibi Benstowe** and **Niall Hurley** writing under a variety of themes and with the experience that comes with time. There is much to be learnt from their effective use of poetic devices to address contemporary social, economic and political issues as well as sensitive personal and community concerns.

**Ben Chamaza's** stunning romantic poetry deserves special mention. You will fall head over heels for this writer. He kept me awake at night when I didn't hear from him for a while. I was worried I would not be able to put his poetry in the journal. When I did hear from him later, I was elated.



# THE JOURNAL OF AFRICAN YOUTH LITERATURE

I would like to recognise our new and previously unpublished voices: **Amy Lubbers, Didi Cooper, Jacob Seth Sons, Jenna Rigby, Jordan Selous** and **Sumiya Vawda**. I appreciate how much effort goes into writing, especially when you don't have as much experience, and also the leap of faith that you take when sending it to be scrutinised and you don't know what kind of feedback, if any, you will receive. Know that we appreciate you and that you are already authors! Whichever road you may take or already be on, this journal is a testament to your creative abilities which will be useful no matter what you decide to do in life.

Authors to look out for beyond these pages are **Aminat Adesanya, Ibrahim Babátúndé Ibrahim, Olabode Ajiboye, Thakirah Allie** and **Xolani Shezi**. These contributors are working to make broad positive social and professional impact and tackling tough issues or just having fun through their own multimedia projects. Xolani's poetry deals with the love-hate relationship many youths have with their urban environment, among other evocative themes. Thakirah's multimedia project *Hey! Sexy* spreads awareness on womxn's spaces, mental health and rape culture. Ibrahim is working on a collection of short stories and Aminat is considering creating a cookbook. Olabode merges his authentic African characters into the comic book genre.

Part of the overall *Jay Lit* project planned is the ***Jay Lit Review***, which will be a collection of articles with a scholarly approach to youth literature and art in the African context, among other related topics. In anticipation of this, we are pleased to present an essay by **Gary Louw**. His matric art exhibit caused (un)necessary controversy in the media in October 2019, though it presented an opportunity for the artist to give clarity on the themes and metaphors he employs in his artwork – for those who care to pay it the attention it deserves.

I hope to continue to publish essays and papers featuring research, analysis and critiques in the *Review*, particularly on key themes raised in the creative writing by *Jay Lit* authors.

Finally, we present a play which makes use of various South African dialects by **Bandile Nkosi**. *Yenz'okuhle* captures the use of language by contemporary African youths – something we hope will continue to be featured in all future issues. This is critical for cultural preservation and an important goal of the journal.

We welcome feedback from our authors and readers as we gear up for issue two. Entries for the next issue will open on 1 February 2020.

**Bronwyn King**

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## Join our Ambassador Programme

Would you be interested in helping us promote the Journal to other authors from your home country? We currently have a *Jay Lit* Ambassador to Nigeria, who has helped us increase the number of submissions from Nigerian writers.

If you want to see your country and home language represented in the Journal, being an Ambassador is a great way to make it happen! We want to address the following through this initiative:

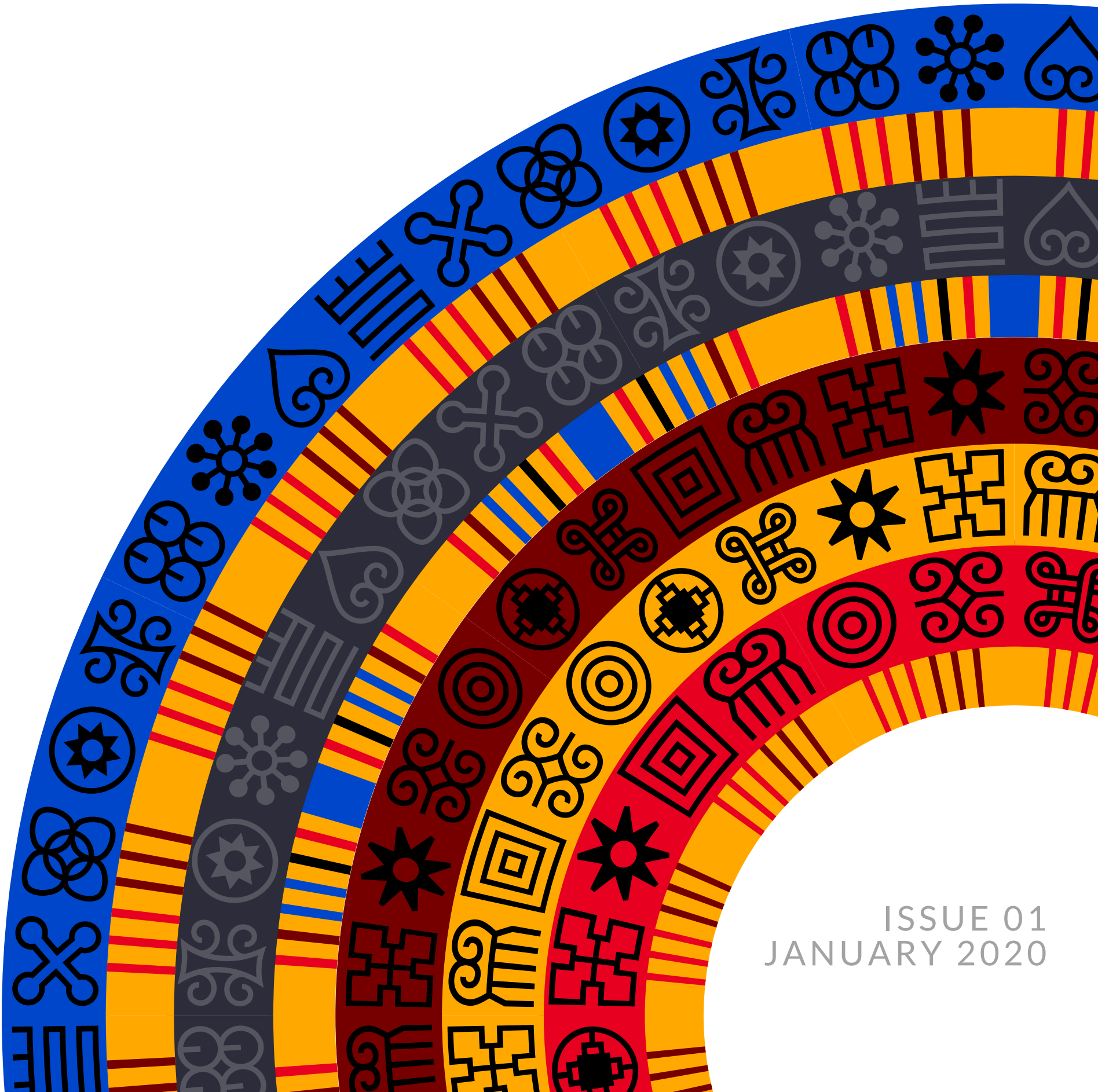
- We currently receive too few **submissions from non-South Africans**. We are determined to change that and are seeking ways to reach other African writers. You can start simply by telling your friends on social media about the Journal.
- We want more **submissions that aren't in English**, though we welcome those too. Perhaps you can help us reach those who are writing or could write in languages such as Swahili, Shona, Zulu, etc. All African languages are welcome as well as those spoken widely in certain regions such as French and Portuguese.
- We are also interested in the way languages are mixed and used together in practice and capturing that for cultural preservation.
- The other challenge we face is **reaching rural areas**. Can you reach out to those in rural areas? Sharing info about *Jay Lit* with a rural high school, a teacher in a rural area, a library, a community forum, etc. can ensure we are more inclusive and give opportunities to those in disadvantaged areas.



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# Poetry





# Mphae Charmaine Mashifane

*Mphae Charmaine Mashifane is a 20-year-old woman born and raised in South Africa. She lives in eMalahleni, Mpumalanga. She completed her matric (NSC Certificate) at Dynamique Private High School and a Generic Management qualification with SIMS Khula. She is currently volunteering at a local newspaper, Witbank News. She started writing poetry in high school. She is passionate about literature and intends to establish a foundation for literature in her community by hosting poetry competitions in local schools, beginning in 2020.*



# The Agenda is to Rise

Mphae Charmaine Mashifane

Every day we work on educating them about their rights.

Preach: “No one has a right to lift their right hand above your rights.”

I stand today stronger than yesterday because I stand up with more knowledge about my strength than I did yesterday.

I stand with symbols.

I stand with questions raised.

I stand with punctuation marks.

I’ve heard of this 21st-century mist.

We’re said to be living with a breathing monster in our midst.

Gran-Gran said once upon a time there was peace.

I’m a respectful lad, so I let her speak.

She told me of marriages that stood.

She counted the number of her siblings as proof.

Gran-Gran believes respect is earned, so she let me speak.

I believe in peace, but we chose justice.

I believe in Rome and that Rome is not its walls.

I believe in fake smiles, make-up hides bruises, I believe in silent cries so yes, marriages stood.

Without mutual respect, without love, those papers served as proof.

There’s always been a monster sleeping in humanity’s midst.

So yes, we are in this mist.

And that’s only because the sun’s about to rise.

But before that, we have to rise.

This is a blurry situation in your eyes.

We’ve awoken a beast.

We’re not equipping women with weapons but rather informing them of the weapons already in their possession.

Teach them their rights so they can know what’s wrong.

Like a boxer fights with both fists while standing on both feet

This monster crumbles under our feet.

This monster that we have sought to kill.

Is the same monster another woman’s son stretches his hand to feed.

He stretches his hand of greed.

He stretches his hand of pride.

He stretches his hand of insecurities wrapped in superiority.

He stretches out his hand of arrogance.

His hand stretches as a result of what he wasn’t told, what he never heard, what he wasn’t shown, what he never saw and everything else that he became.

Mommy tell him.

While he feeds on your breast whisper in his sleep, whisper that he may dream.

Tell him his light doesn’t shine brighter by dimming mine.

Daddy remind him.

As he awakens to chase his dreams.

Remind him he’s a star.

Remind him I’m a star.

Remind him we are stars.

Stars don’t rattle.

Stars don’t battle.

Stars Rise.





## Anchal Ashi Baniparsadh

*Anchal Ashi Baniparsadh is a South African-born poet, professional and businesswoman of Indian descent who lives in Ballito, KZN. She has a keen interest in writing creatively and has recently revealed her natural affinity for words by writing poems in various themes and styles. Her reverse poem “Do I Love You?” was exhibited at the Aspects Literary Festival in Northern Ireland, UK, and published in the 2018 edition of the Bangor Literary Journal. Anchal believes that exposing youth to the power of words is crucial to personal development and can potentially enhance their ability to express their deepest emotions. Power generally has a shelf life, but the power of words arranged into poetry remains an eternal shelving glory. This poem is aimed at developing emotional intelligence in youth.*



# The Often Disguised Gift of Hope

Anchal Ashi Baniparsadh

You are just a little kid  
And you should never ever believe those who say  
You can achieve great things even at this young age  
The absolute reality is that  
Success comes only with age and experience  
And although people have begun to believe that  
Motivation and determination leads you to achieving anything  
No matter how old you are  
They are indeed mistaken because  
You are just a little kid  
It is disappointing that the world makes you believe that  
Absolutely anything is possible  
And you begin to have infinite hope that  
You can achieve the most complex dreams  
I hope you soon realise and accept the reality that  
You are just a little kid  
And you will not achieve dreams bigger than yourself because  
You will simply be a successful failure  
So do not even begin to be under the impression that  
You can do anything that you put your mind to  
Because no matter what  
You are just a little kid  
So I wish you would stop believing that  
You have the power to reach for the stars

(Now start reading this from the bottom to the top)





## Gaëlle Lonji

*Gaëlle Lonji is a language teacher by profession and a student. Her heart remains with her native Kinshasa in the DRC, but she has lived in Johannesburg for 20 years, and she considers it home. She has a deep love for the city. She has a passion for literature and storytelling and hopes to someday be a full-time storyteller, poet and overall creative. Gaëlle greets each day with gratitude.*



# Johannesburg, An Ode

Gaelle Lonji

Johannesburg, there's no-one like you  
Devotion like ours happens at first sight  
What we are never needed a name  
You've guided me sternly  
On this sacred search for golden truth  
You know my heart. You have nothing left to prove  
I am your citizen because you're the home I always choose  
We gave life to each other. We are womb to tomb. You feed me  
And I feed you

In your gentle ways, you awakened this woman  
You taught me to be brave  
You said that all we needed to survive together was courage  
You broke my virginity and opened my eyes  
We gave birth to a dare to dream that a love as rare as ours  
Would, someday, amidst the violence, blossom  
And bend and break but once again  
rise up to stand tall, majestic, awesome

Johannesburg, when you smile, I smile  
From your alleys  
To the penthouse suites  
At the naval of Africa's richest square mile  
Egoli's nocturnal children bask reverently  
In your all day long midnight hour glowing  
Our lady. Red lipstick wearing  
Vodacom tower protects us like a warrior mother  
All knowing

Defeating the odds, just to say we did it  
That's your spirit.  
Johannesburg, you are a dream come true  
All you do is inspire me  
Do you know that I'm a fool for you?  
Each time you break my heart, I want to tell you  
That I love you too  
And I love you more  
Your mystifying thunderstorm  
That's my favourite lullaby to hear  
You take my breath away, drown and sink my fears

I live at your pace and walk in your rhythm  
I've know you as lover, friend and kin  
At your right hand is my seat  
My footsteps sound your sweet, sweet heartbeat  
When I succeed and when I fail, you're the objective witness  
You showed me I'm just like you  
Invincible, powerful, limitless



To me, you are the centre of this and every other universe  
This is how I met you. It's how I'll meet you anew  
Until your return to the earth  
Dust to dust.  
The intelligent heart. The benevolent businessman  
The place I call home  
The one I trust

Your rain falls like sombre, unadulterated despair  
Your melody is hap-hazardous. You are chaotic, and all too generous  
You're my oxygen. My air.  
I need to breathe you in again and again and  
I pray for the power to take in more. Never to exhale  
You are unashamed. Your stars and your sun casting holy, glorious light  
Your children sleep restlessly on your lap and we stand behind you  
Not by sight

Johannesburg, you are immortal. I cannot own you. I cannot tame you  
In all the ways I know how I will always belong to you

I'm pressured to pardon your promiscuous proposal for pleasure

When I tried to talk, instead I trembled and the tears trailed

I must've mistaken a moment of malice for magic and  
Maybe my mind will amend the monster I made of myself  
When it meant to muster that my melanin mister  
Was a master manipulator  
My melancholy multiplies

Open your arms to me and accept that my surrender  
To you will be eternal  
I cannot comprehend your apprehension  
You're my lifeline  
Why won't you pretend you feel the same way  
If only in this lifetime?









## Chrissie Chinebuah

*Chrissie Chinebuah is a Ghana-based writer. She holds a BA in international relations from Boston University and a degree in law from City University of London. Her work is forthcoming or has been published in Momaya, Agbowó, Through the Eyes of African Women, Feminessay, and For Women Who Roar. Chrissie also served as the editor-in-chief at Boston University for a literary publication entitled The Chimaerid.*



## Till Crockery Do Us Part

My African mother once explained,  
To the childhood version of myself,  
That cooking was an aphrodisiac  
For the chivalrous ring-wielding males.  
That day the Ghanaian sun morphed  
From a golden orb into a charcoal stove  
As it torched an old-fashioned cliché awake.  
She populated my nightmares  
With modern-day bogeymen,  
Bread-winning food critics  
To exchange vows with at the altar.  
It seemed to me in my youthful oblivion  
That pots and pans paved the path  
To dollhouse matrimony – to happy homes.  
So I bloomed with charred palms  
And blossomed into a culinary warrior  
Well-versed in the ancient language of spices.  
For years I broiled hearts and grilled intellects,  
I even seared my emotions to a palatable state,  
Just in the name of satiating, for the lust of man.

I soon discovered that cooking,  
The one my mother urged I embrace,  
Meant I must bring value to any table I sit at.

## A Trial By Jury – Televised

Let Africa speak for itself –  
You cannot find the voice of a nation  
In your television screens:  
Derogatory propagandist campaigns  
Blaring cries of poverty, singing songs of revolution,  
Sounds that force the bitter taste of subservience.

Let the people of Africa  
Wear the garments of acceptance  
Before you clothe them in the costume of frauds –  
An appointment to duplicitous practices,  
A seat in front of the moonlight of computers.  
Let the African narrative be still,  
Unmoved by the currents of discourse,  
Tainted calls to satisfy bloodthirsty headlines  
Of corruption as a political opiate, of death in times of peace  
“We interrupt this poem to bring you breaking news of a war in...”

Listen to its side of the story.





## Frank Meintjies

*Frank Meintjies is based in Johannesburg and works in the field of social development. Frank's creative writing has been included in several anthologies including, for example, Botsotso 18: Poetry from Private and Public Places and Sol Plaatje European Union Poetry Anthology Vol IV. He also regularly contributes to the world of poetry through participation in public readings.*



## Frank Meintjies, poetry collection

### Crowning glory

The crowning glory  
tells its own story  
here in the teeming streets

Jozi, Livinginstone, Harare, Manzini, Gabs  
a dash of this, a touch of that  
a bead here, a thread there  
a streak of orange,  
patterns of conversation  
woven in

Old school chum...  
an aunty's daughter...  
malume's favourite...  
neighbour's neighbour...  
you remain inimitably *you*

A smoothness, a tug, a twist, a fastened gaze  
a centre-path that veins your thoughts  
ripples that fan out  
into the edges of a laugh

A glint of friendliness  
raised eyebrow on selfie face  
a certain stillness in the taxi queue  
all this  
(firmly) on its way  
down the street

Who we are, who we aren't  
the pain and pleasure of defining 'we'

### Burnt child, healing

Under geniality  
beneath the pelt and underskin of fortitude  
the burnt child  
sizzles  
small eyes  
amid a bundle of scars  
the child emits  
sharp bursts of steam  
even now  
so many years later

each spring  
momentarily  
a small creative space opens up inside;  
the burnt child feels  
he's looking ahead  
taking each day  
as it comes



# Biko

We travel on without you  
without your thoughts, bold words, naked courage  
the dank waters lap up everywhere  
rural settlements lay numb in sun and dryness  
often, clouds hang like grey lids  
over bursting settlements  
now and again, there are marchers  
with torches of protest

The memory of you – the direct eyes, the forward-leaning, the cocked ear... is  
lodged behind a grille  
contained in a song that's hardly sung  
set on a dusty plaque in an old building  
at the end of a narrow side road

In writhing dreams  
your body is broken, again and again  
you slip on a soap bar  
you plummet from a 7th-floor cell  
to see if you bruise, you are dropped like an anchor  
from a farm truck  
you are shot in the back  
during protests

The real-life men  
with blood-tipped boots  
who cornered and outnumbered you  
they, who dropped men's bodies from heady heights  
have not fallen; at best, they're  
sinewed and stiffened by old age

Ah, leader who's forever-young  
the mountains call your name  
the waters swirl  
we lumber up, breathing hard against the cliff  
without you









## Ben Chamaza

*Ben Chamaza wrote his first poem when he was 11. His teacher encouraged him because he believed it was the best in the class. It was titled “Ndipite kwathu”, meaning “I want to go home”. Ben is the only writer in his family. His parents divorced when he was very young, and sadly neither one cared for Ben. He went to live with his poor grandmother in a village where life was tough. Ben confesses that his writing is fuelled by emotions arising from his parents’ unstable relationship. “Writing is not actually easy, as it may seem, but sometimes I realise that I have written something even if I don’t want to. It makes me feel better. I think I can find it so hard to explain myself, but I feel like my poems explain so much about me, almost everything about me.” Ben is 21 and from Lilongwe, Malawi.*



## Candlelight

By the candlelight at night,  
The world was calm and quiet,  
A poor heart made a good reader,  
As eyes saw a nation leader.  
A minute mind in an empty space,  
Unlocking the future with a sluggish face,  
Pa used to preach oh yes!  
'Sleep, but life will be a mess'  
So by the candlelight at night,  
She buried that curse.  
By the candlelight it was cold,  
But she conquered the bed of course,  
A little shower on the roof of rain,  
The peeping coldness promising days of no pain,  
A butterfly flew by  
and it was time to sleep again.

*Candlelight is a poem about a poor tender-aged woman who never gives up on her education dreams and, through several hardships she encounters, she finally makes it.*

## Eternal Bug

Round and round,  
The bug buzzed  
Round the lamp.  
Someone wanted light,  
a little rest at night,  
But with that sound?  
The bug buzzed round?  
With a shabby broom,  
Round and round,  
They chased each  
other round the room.  
Oh! he blew out his lamp,  
Oh! he broke bad his leg,  
Oh! he injured again his neck,  
And of course he died instead.  
Round and Round,  
The bug buzzed  
Round his corpse  
On the bed.

*Eternal bug is a poem about a man who struggles to kill an insect that troubles him as it buzzes round and round his little lamp. The literal understanding of this poem is that he fails in his attempt; killing himself instead. The main idea behind this poem is that it's not all the time that we have to battle things troubling us. Sometimes we have to leave things the way they are to avoid finding ourselves surrounded by misfortunes because of toiling to make things better. A little insect cannot move round and round a lamp forever. Soon it will burn up in the same fire it is playing with.*



# Late Regrets

I messed up yesterday  
it was seen,  
Am not waking up today  
living by that same sin scene.  
I left school, true fool,  
They all say,  
I work dirty at thirty,  
Still making it that way.  
Got pregnant, poor girl,  
Suffered of course they could tell,  
How I wish they were there to see,  
What took me to that part of the sea.  
Am here, am there,  
No matter how or where,  
It may be filthy, but I ceased to care,  
That's my share, Life ain't always fair.

*In Late Regrets, the life of a troubled youth, the narrator, ends up in a way it was not supposed to be. However, acceptance of situations sometimes is the best way to overcome the anguish of failure.*

# Among all things Amanda

You are like a sweet home  
In a thick forest promising no hope

You are like a warm scarf  
In a cold morning that never ceases to laugh

You are like a refuge cage  
From wild animals coming in rage

You are like a tasty song  
For hard journeys that are so long

You are like a white butterfly  
Spreading peace with wings in a blue sky

You are like a desert stream  
Whose existence is like a king's dream

You are like an arrowproof shield  
For a languished warrior in a battle field

You are like a soft pillow  
That makes a fool dream like a hero

You are like a sage  
Revealing truths of life hiding in the hedge

But among all things you are my love  
A thing that my heart is proud to have

# From my 80s

As we walked along that cold blue sea,  
Old age was something we couldn't see,  
Seeing you moving just right beside me,  
That the sun sets was hard to believe.

Everything in the world has changed,  
We can never open our doors to the past,  
I can smell the future with a lot of tears,  
Hold my hand and let our love conquer our fears,  
And let those old songs make us young,  
Boris Gardiner with Kool and The Gang,  
Waking up with you so that life we can still cherish,  
Until the day from the world we perish.

Do you know dear?  
That though I seem grey in hair,  
Though I cannot still make you happy like a love nightmare,  
For you, like mama's love, I still care?

Love is God's greatest creation,  
Yes am old your beauty has gone,  
But tell me love,  
Can you feel age in my word?  
When I say from the bottom to the top of my world,  
I love you so much?

# Walking to your heart

When you sit on that hill,  
If there is no love your soul can feel,  
No shoulder to give you a home and hold you still,  
Remember am on my way to pay that bill.

On my way to your heart,  
I get lost in the frost and feel so much pain,  
I walk slow in the mud and get cold in the rain,  
But I've harvested too much love to make your tears drain.

All these dark days a sunset has to make,  
If your bed is lonely nobody to kiss your neck,  
Afraid of love wanting not a loving heart to break,  
Am coming with love that thunders can't dare to shake.  
From all three corners of your day,  
There is really a shadow that wants you to see,  
It may fall from this tree or move out of that sea,  
But if you fail to explain love, just look up to me.

It's easy to live in a world that  
Knows not how to love,  
But I can't quit running to your heart  
Though it is so hard to have,  
Hear my footsteps when you close your ears,  
See my smiles when you close your eyes,  
Am walking to your heart.





## Fubaraibi Benstowe

*Fubaraibi Anari Benstowe was born in Bonny Kingdom, Rivers State Nigeria, and attended the Niger Delta University in Bayelsa State Nigeria, where he obtained his bachelors in electrical and electronic engineering. His poetry has been published in Praxis Magazine and the Nigeria/South Korea Poetry Anthology, among others. In 2014, Fubara was listed as a top-ten finalist in the Africa-wide BN Poetry Awards based in Uganda, as first runner-up in the Eriata Iribabhor Poetry Prize in 2014, and in 2016 he was longlisted for a BN Poetry Award.*

# The Funeral

## Fubaraibi Benstowe

I

“Afini! I call you like I did when you were a boy  
When you bathed under the rain naked and happy  
When you, my son, wrestled with other kids over playthings  
Now you lie there, silent, not talking to me  
This is the house you grew in, you and your siblings  
These are the faces of your beloveds: Tumini, Boma and Bala  
These people playing the Agaba drums are your age grades  
But you lie there, silent, unable to dance.”

I watched his father’s hands tremble as he uttered these words  
I was a child, but remember the stony faces of kinsmen  
A day of sorrow and undulations  
The women all rode on dust, broken  
“Is this how you leave?”  
Then he shows again, I mean the old man.  
This time, he held a machete and a broom  
He places the machete on the right hand of the dead  
Then places the broom on the left  
He said: the spirit of the dead knows its killers  
It knows the hearts of men and sees beyond our eyes  
Take! Take! with this knife, visit those who denied you  
The sweetness of breath  
With this broom sweep those who snatched from you  
the sweetness of light  
I have denied no man his goat  
nor a cup of water,  
Neither dug a pit for a fellow  
He who said death is sweet, let him taste it  
Let his wife become a widow  
let his children become fatherless too  
Let them run through streets without pants  
And let this air we all share come to him like a fume  
And all echoed “amen”

II

I do not know if the dead hear our voices  
If truly they direct the paths of their carriers  
I wonder at the dramas of huge men  
Staggering on their way to gravesides  
They say when a corpse refuses to be buried  
It is angry, because its killer is standing by

It seeks for vengeance.

When a coffin directs its carriers  
It leads them to the houses of its beloved  
It seeks to say farewell, to the visited one  
Who must come out with a bottle of gin  
And beg the corpse to return to dust.  
I remember how we ran into houses  
For it is taboo for children to behold a coffin.





## Donell Williams

*Donell Williams is a 19-year-old indie poet residing in Johannesburg. When he's not plagued by the moral dilemma of liking The Smiths and hating Morrissey, he reads modern and post-modern poetry. He is currently working on his second anthology, In a Bathtub Eating Lettuce, and samples of his work can be found on Instagram: @d.wpoems*

# w regards contours & capitalism

Donell Williams

market gods  
are wankers  
i have a distaste  
for contours  
& offensive edges

no wait  
all edges are  
offensive by  
virtue of  
principle

of which  
we cannot  
ascertain  
the specifics  
regarding that

still market gods  
are wankers  
big macs  
in a desert  
rainbow

their chosen  
people  
under the brollies  
of the pre-  
sidential dead

it's not rain-  
ing but they  
keep dry  
like what  
i imagine

a femur  
to be like  
they could've  
had a pair  
if they weren't

so alien  
everybody's  
got a little  
trump in their  
scalp

you eat alien  
flesh  
it's not can-  
nibalistic so  
what it is then



yes meat  
is murder  
but only where  
animals are  
involved

i can't rep  
that ex-  
tra-terrestrial  
being eating  
MY space

w absolutely  
no opinion  
on contours &  
edges  
what's that word

for the  
gargantuan  
contour  
that literally  
every

tom, dick, coke  
& mcdonalds has  
pared & penetrated  
let me  
pray

to their gods  
those wanker  
market gods on  
behalf of  
every sinner



Artist: Bianca Gouveia







## Didi Cooper

*Didi Cooper, born Litsitso Cooper, was born on July 31st 1998 in Bloemfontein, Free State. Her parents, both medical doctors, are from Lesotho. Raised in a mixed culture home (Liberian and Sesotho) in Maseru, Lesotho, she did her primary education at St Gabriel's Independent School, and her secondary education at Ladybrand High School, matriculating in 2016. She is currently studying for her bachelors degree in acting for camera at City Varsity in Cape Town. Passionate about her home continent, feminism and social issues, she hopes to promote African stories through her acting, writing and poetry.*

# Africa is Crying

Didi Cooper

Africa is crying  
From her horn that is Somalia  
To her root that is South Africa  
To her crown that is Egypt

Africa is weeping  
She is in tears looking at what is happening in front of her  
Her daughters are being used, abused and killed like flies by her sons  
While slavery in her horn is still intact  
And her children are killing one another like it is hunting season  
Because they are not the right nationality

Africa is angry  
She can feel her children's blood leaking on her land  
Turning her soil scarlet red  
Africa is hopeful  
All she wants is her children to unite and love each other  
Africa is praying  
Praying that one day all will heal  
And finally be one

Africa is us  
Africa is home





## Niall Hurley

*Niall believes poetry is our best chance at laying bare the truth, no matter how uncomfortable that truth may be. He has been previously published in Best New African Poets: 2016 anthology, as well as Africa, UK, and Ireland: Writing Politics and Knowledge Production Vol. 1. Much of his poetry focuses on the intricacies of life in South Africa and the disparity between its diverse people. He currently works in the Johannesburg tech industry as a UX writer and content strategist.*

## The Mourning After

We came back  
because apartheid was over...  
ah-ah-ah, not so fast.  
*Dink nou weer.*<sup>1</sup>  
White, Black, Indian, Coloured;  
*Wit, Swart, Indies, Kleurling,*<sup>2</sup>  
the old monikers remain –  
expelled in the hangover breath  
of our liberators turned bureaucrats,  
belched onto every form and application.  
“Ethnicity?  
No, South African’s not an option.”  
Race sticks to us like generational sweat  
that can only be washed by generational soap.  
But then, our liber-crats might argue,  
hangover is better than hanged.

## A beast called Jo

A beast squats large upon the Highveld,  
a heaving spiteful monster,  
with spines of glass and concrete,  
borne from acrid lightning  
and the greed of foreign men.  
Through eyes lit by shack-fire,  
it stares out from the Plateau  
and casts out golden lures  
laced with drops of greener grass.  
But all are lost who take a bite;  
the beast is a chimaera.

It gorges on its people’s ambition,  
doling out triumphs  
in relative quotas,  
so that each becomes an addict of More.  
Five-million junkies and growing,  
all snarling at each other  
while holding hands.  
Why don’t they just go?  
They would if they could,  
but they belong to Jo.

---

<sup>1</sup> Afrikaans: Think again.

<sup>2</sup> White, Black, Indian, Coloured.





## Jacob Seth Sons

*Jacob Sons is a 26-year-old medical doctor living in Pietermaritzburg. Born in eSwatini, Sons was raised by his mother in Pondoland in the Eastern Cape. Jacob's mother tongue is isiXhosa, but he has always had a passion for English literature and believes that poetry can be used as a tool to give voice to the voiceless and champion the downtrodden. In his free time, Jacob enjoys singing and playing guitar.*

## The Home of Darkness

There is darkness, in a world once serene,  
Destruction, filth in a place once clean.  
She awakes, terrified, in pain, alone.  
With surreal realisation that her womb was once a home,  
To every man who now has life,  
To every father, son, husband of every wife.  
To every teacher, driver, postman, men we trust,  
Policemen, politicians, none are free of lust.

In agony, she fears, she can't protect her daughter,  
From the darkness of rape, abuse and slaughter.  
Her country burns while her leaders sleep,  
Their silence is deafening, the insult is deep.  
The silent cries of thousands of women ring,  
All they're told is to "pray and sing".  
Her body is perceived as nothing but an object,  
The countless violations continue justice unchecked.  
But in the darkness, embers have been stoked.  
Soon a fire will blaze. She is provoked.  
With impunity they now denigrate and mock.  
They did not know when you strike a woman, you've struck a rock.



## King of Cape Hermes

I stood on a dusty road beneath a hill  
On which she loomed, ominously grey  
An expansive, derelict, overgrown ruin  
like a gargantuan statue in the jungle  
There she stood observing the ocean  
A once-majestic titan  
From another time, a bygone era –  
When she was the Eastern Empress  
White, beautiful, regal, perfect.

Now cracked, burned out and broken  
like an aged beauty queen  
Slowly succumbing to the years  
she endlessly observes the blue expanse.

A dim-witted creature smilingly sat  
Regarding the endless grey sea  
From her once gallant observatory.  
His skin, sun-darkened beneath  
Filthy tattered rags whipping wildly in the wind.  
He looked down on me from his perch  
Between the glassless windows of  
The once aristocratic titan, the fallen Empress  
and proclaimed, “Behold, ye,  
I am King of the Cape Hermes.  
The most splendid hotel that was, is, and ever will be.”

And lo, the wind stilled, the sky cleared  
The ocean quietened. As if nature,  
in her omniscience,  
to pacify his tortured mind  
Whisperingly replied,  
“Yes, your Majesty,  
You are and it is.”







## Xolani Henry Shezi

*Xolani Henry Shezi is a poet, lyricist, and a composer foremost from South Africa. He was christened as Mxo by his late mother. His father went AWOL before he was born and Xolani has never met him, nor his father's clan. He is an aspirant music, entertainment, social and start-up entrepreneur. He is an orphan with a burning desire to be a future billionaire. His maternal surname is Zibani, and his paternal surname is Shezi. He attended Tugela Secondary School and Mangosuthu Technikon. He is currently embarked on a work in progress, his debut poetry book, which earnestly needs a publisher. A spoken-word project is in the pipeline. He can be reached via Facebook: Xolani Shezi (Mxoh), or on +27 72 988 5133.*

## Walkin' thru Point Street

With every breath of greatness, a sea of misery awaits  
These are the thoughts that exhume themselves within the tombs  
Of anger from my sad, lonely heart as I  
Journey around you –  
Durban  
Durban, you are a beauty  
Yet how I love to hate you.

Durban, allow me not to speak about your breath-taking skyscrapers  
Nor of your concrete beds cherished by the homeless.  
Durban, you are a beauty  
Yet how I love to hate you...

Durban, allow me not to speak about the yellow-bones  
Nor of the dark-bones with curvaceous hypnotizing bodies  
The beautiful dames who moonlight  
For a mere hundred and forty bucks, whilst conjuring  
Up an unbreakable courage beneath their crumbled spirit.  
Durban, you are a beauty  
Yet how  
I love to hate you.



## Letters to Heaven

Heavenly bliss entwined  
With cloves of majestic aura;  
Cloaks with multiple divine hues  
Let me redefine this  
Newly found  
Love.

Letters to heaven  
Let us go to heaven  
Letters to heaven  
May you  
Reach  
Heaven; find my mama's haven and  
Dine with  
Her  
Tell mama I think of her  
Tell ma:  
Ma, I try on a daily basis to be a good son.  
Tell mama I am sorry that I no  
Longer remember her smile  
Nor her voice  
Neither do I remember her complexion  
Even though her phantom flickers  
on the corners of my existence  
Forever mocking my memory with shadows of her joyfulness

Tell mama I still remember what she told me when  
I came back from school  
With bruises on my heart  
She said:  
My son, in life, always pull your  
Socks up.

Letters to heaven tell mama I  
cry everyday  
Letters to heaven tell mama  
I have chosen to cry no more;  
Tell mama it is not that I hate her  
For leaving me an orphan –  
I have to spread my wings  
Be the masterpiece that  
You wanted me to be.

Letters to heaven  
Take me to heaven  
Show me  
Heaven.

## Ndenze ntoni na?

Had I a pair of wings; I would flap them  
Courageously, and soar straight to heaven  
Gallop as the Mighty Thor;  
within the sacred hallways of heaven  
Demand to speak with God  
Without the presence of his bodyguards  
Look him in the eyes and ask:  
*Ndenze ntoni na?*<sup>3</sup>  
Why is it that I'm being blissfully slapped by  
Challenges on a daily basis?  
*Ndenze ntoni na?*  
*Wenze ntoni na?*<sup>4</sup>  
You! My grandest of creations, simply  
Refuse to let forth the greatness that  
I, the king of kings  
The God of kings  
Have bestowed  
Upon you  
*Ndenze ntoni na?*

---

<sup>3</sup> What have I done?

<sup>4</sup> What have you done?





## Aminat Adesanya

*Aminat Adesanya is a mother and wife from Lagos, Nigeria. She has an undying love for cooking, teaching, and kids. She is also pro-African, and very proud of her heritage. She presently does freelance writing on topics revolving around her interests. She scribbles poems in her personal journal and shows them to other people from time to time. She is studying for a masters degree in advanced teaching (education). She hopes one day to publish a cookbook, and maybe more books covering her other areas of interest.*

# Africa: words, I do not have enough

Aminat Adesanya

This is my African culture and heritage  
So much has gone and come with age

Growing and becoming even more beautiful and adorable  
When I think of the melodies, they are all so memorable

I marvel at the courtship dance of the Wadaabe  
Embodying the natural beauty of women of their tribe

So much I long for the tribe of Hamar  
And the bull jumping of the Hamar

Can't get over the ones that say goodbye  
By the spitting of the Massai

Their bodies moving from hand to hand  
As they demonstrate the healing dance of the San

Such is the culture in Namibia  
What of the bountiful tribes in Nigeria

You should pay particular attention to the work of  
Bronze and Sculptures from the city of Benin

And don't get me to begin with the  
Durbars, from Kano to Zaria, and Birnin-Kebbi

Respect to the marriage culture of the Sotho  
I particularly love it with South-Africa and Lesotho

A special feature on TV couldn't pass on the delicacy in Mozambique  
That chicken dish of Galinha à Zambeziana is so unique

How is the making of Le Lablabi thick soup of the Tunisian  
You've got to try the Falafel, also known as Ta'meya breakfast meal of the Egyptian

We speak in tongues; Akan, Swahili, Fulani, Kanuri... to Zulu, Yoruba  
The Igbo, Ibibio, Kreol, Amharic, Shona, Hausa, Wolof, Chichewa

All along the Nile, and Niger, Senegal, Orange, Limpopo, Zambezi and the Congo  
To Mount Kenya, and Stanley, Simien, Elgon, Atlas and Kilimanjaro

A curtain of thundering smoke, the beautiful glory of Zambezi tipping over  
The world marvels at the wondrous Victoria Falls... the great Mosi-o-Tunya

As the sun rises across the North, East, West, South and the middle  
In our diversity lies our strength; we're an ever soaring eagle

This is a picture of my African culture and heritage in a rough  
Because of the words needed to say it in full, I do not have enough





## Lisa Dlamini

*Lisa is a 30-year-old Durbanite. She loves writing, reading and movies. The 2007 mystery/thriller Lust, Caution is her favourite movie. These poems are the first works she has published. She says, "My poetry may not speak to it, but I love people and I love to observe how we interact with the world. So I hope you enjoy my writing and I hope it makes you feel even the things you don't want to, because they're sometimes the most important."*

# All the wounds you cannot see

## Proud

We are the ones they don't tell you about  
the ones with no master our ancients  
dreams.

We who do not subscribe to a religion  
Who carry no anger from the past.

We who live in the acknowledgement and  
blessing of the present.  
We are the ones they call proud and why  
shouldn't we be proud?

After all we can't all be this black or  
this beautiful, this love the love for  
ourselves is our vengeance let's never  
cease.

## The uncultivated seed

Restless minds, fertile bodies blend together  
in a mesh of flesh, sweat drips from him to  
her from her to him.

Creating a wet pool of lust which soon turns to  
unspoken regret.  
Desire lasting all of 5 minutes leaves embedded  
in her a seed.

But things created by foolish people through  
thoughtless acts have no chance of survival  
they are sure to be ripped of their innocence

Thrown into trash cans left to lie amongst  
yesterday's garbage, a beautiful seed, dead,  
cold, unloved, unwanted and alone.

Unrecognizable in its plastic filth covered  
package.



# All the wounds you cannot see

## Wholly

Blessed are those who have never known love  
for they can settle for carbon copies of fake  
adoration and pain disguised as love.

Fortunate are those that have never looked in the eyes  
of someone who truly loves them for they  
maybe satisfied by the look of infatuation  
and successfully confuse sex with the act of  
love.

Happy are those who never had anyone battle  
their demons and love them through it. For  
they may be comforted with mere companionship  
or the warmth of any human body.

## All the wounds you cannot see

He told you he loved you today, and man  
didn't it feel good?  
It felt like a warm summer day, tasted like  
strawberries dipped in chocolate.

He said you're the one, and boy those words  
sounded like your father had never abandoned  
your mother and had stayed to raise you.  
They sounded like every boy, man you've ever  
loved returned to love you.

He said he had never met anyone like you  
and it's true you know it's true, you know,  
it's true that's why you've had a permanent  
smile upon your face since he left.

But he hasn't called has he? with every  
sweet word he says he takes a little more  
of you.

I heard someone say once a woman gives  
of her body to receive love and a man gives  
words in order to use that body to have that body.  
Now ask yourself how often the word love has  
materialized into a verb?

## All the wounds you cannot see

### Wait, I'm afraid

I'm afraid that if I show them how  
smart I am no one will like me,  
it's been proven to be true.  
I'm afraid that if I truly  
learn to love myself, I mean really  
embrace strengths and weaknesses  
then no one else will love me,  
it's been proven to be true.  
I'm a woman and I'm scared, that if I  
attain all my goals then  
no man will love me they'll see  
me as a threat,  
it's been proven to be true.  
But more than anything I'm scared,  
I'm terrified that I'll meet someone  
who destroys all these proven truths.





## Jordan Selous

*Jordan Selous is a matric student from Cape Town with a passion for literature. She says, “I believe in the beauty of this world, the importance of human connection and empathy. I try to live my life keeping this in mind, and by expressing it in my writing. Reading is one of the most magical things this world has to offer, and it has shaped who I am, and who I want to be.” Jordan plans to pursue a BA with English literature as one of the courses to further her understanding and passion for the written and spoken word.*

## Ode to Cape Town

You are shades of grey;  
pure white swirled with night;  
obsidian black flecked with snow.  
The painter's brush  
is stained gold at its tip  
with the shades of poverty  
seeping in from above.  
You are fresh sea mist  
sweeping into the city bowl,  
convivial mountains of imposing heights  
gazing out to the ocean's horizon  
with bustling streets, thorns of crimson,  
and a wilting system at its feet.  
Oxymoron filled with braai smoke:  
Cape Town, my city  
Kaapstad, my home

## The Past

jubilance is a farce.  
our hearts throb with the voices of the past  
reaching for lambent light that ebbs away  
from the space between our knuckles to our fingertips.  
don't you know that the ashes and bones of our blood were once memories?  
an amalgamation of thoughts and sparks and  
pulsing life that began on wobbling sea legs and  
ended  
as they fell backwards and gazed milkily at the blue ocean of the sky.  
now they are dead.  
but they remain entrenched in our tears, our recollections, our fingertips as  
we unceasingly  
Create

## Tears

when you cry,  
cry in the sunlight –  
preferably with a mirror in hand.  
look at how the droplets catch  
and cradle the sunlight.  
observe with blurry perspective,  
how, in the bright hue, they possess the sun for a few seconds –  
how they possess the most influential star we have in our universe.  
Tears can be so powerful  
and cleansing  
that even stars want to revel in them  
(because they have none of their own)



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# Short Stories







## Jonas Zai Chisi

*Jonas Zai Chisi is a fourth-year student at Chancellor College in Zomba, Malawi. He was born in Mzuzu, Malawi and is studying for a bachelors degree in education (languages). Jonas says, "Writing is my redeemed doppelgänger. Writing is the breath that nourishes my body, the soul that defines the 'I' in 'me', the fire that burns injustice in my society."*

# Katherine

Jonas Zai Chisi

I tried to explain to him that she was just a friend. He just laughed.

You know how it hurts when you try to explain something in length and your friend simply laughs.

“This it? Just a laugh. *Basi?*”<sup>6</sup> I was fuming in anger. I didn’t understand why he had asked me to explain myself and then went into a stupid frenzy – and that was that. At that moment, I wished I was a hurricane to sweep away every trace of him from the face of this damned earth.

“Come on nigga, *zatha basi.*”<sup>7</sup> It’s no big deal yoo. I was simply asking, you know,” he said while patting me on my back.

I wanted to spit on his gullible face when Kathy emerged from the corner of the library building. All the anger in me melted into a drop of love hanging over my head like the tongues of fire on the heads of apostles during Pentecost. Bless knew something had happened, and certainly it wasn’t the Holy Spirit’s visitation. He turned around, and he knew the power that had instantly transformed me into such a blissful state.

“Today you are going to talk to her,” he whispered into my left ear.

I just smiled at him. The anger that was flaming in my eyes seconds ago had been put out by the stream of love that was flowing from the hill in my left eye to the shallow canyon down my cheek.

I didn’t even hear him speak. I was already in my blissful world holding Kathy close to me – telling her stories of how her beauty had been scribbled on my heart since first year.

She approached us, and her torso danced to the tune of her firm and hairy legs. I watched every part of her body move, and I was mesmerized seeing all her body cells vibrating while echoing to me sorrowful songs of loneliness.

“Today I will speak to her,” I made up my mind.

The short distance from the library corner to the noticeboard where we perched seemed a kilometer long as Kathy was still walking while singing songs that tickled my heart into merriment. I sometimes saw her dance while at other times she retreated into her own loneliness complex, and that gave me extra energy to talk to her.

“I will talk to her,” I repeated to myself.

Slowly, Bless ceased to exist in the scene. The argument about Brenda had suddenly subsided into oblivion, and it was finally me and Kathy. We were no longer outside library parameters. We were somewhere deep into the world I created specifically for her and I. She was holding my hand, telling me stories she had wanted to tell me from year one. I listened while I smiled at everything she said.

After walking a bit, she would tickle me and run. I would run after her, hold her in my arms and throw her in the air where she would fly as if she had wings and then perch on my back as if she was a dove.

“Today you are too quiet,” she said slowly without any mark of frustration or want of explanation. She was a beautiful creature, and I was searching for the right words to explain my fully nurtured love to her.

She stopped and looked me in the eye. I looked back with a sheath of dew covering my eyes. I thought she asked me if I loved her. I didn’t hesitate. I answered as if I had been waiting my whole life for this moment. I didn’t care if she had really asked the question or not. The answer was already on my lips.

“I do, Katherine.”

“Who is Katherine?”

Brenda pinched my nose, and I flinched. My mouth maintained a stricture as if I was about to kiss someone. I flinched again, and sweat was dripping from every corner of my lean body. The fever had not left me yet.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Basi?* (Nyanga): That’s it?

<sup>7</sup> *zatha basi*: it’s over.





## Israel Lumile

*Israel Lumile is 27 years old and stays in Durban, South Africa. He discovered his interest in literature later in life after studying for a degree in the humanities field at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. He has noticed that the human experience from ancient times to the modern era is brilliantly understood through storytelling.*

# Tonight, Janny is smiling

Israel Lumile

Janny stares at his slim and lean yet wealthy uncle amused. The man is giving flares of gesticulations and makes politically influenced comments as he watches the business section of the news. Uncle jumps up and down, points and waves at the television placed on a twentieth-century room divider. He's so active for a wealthy man, Janny thinks. The stereotypical man of riches always lays reclined on the chair with his nourished hill of a belly, and the only activity he does is to instruct his employees and his maids what to do. His uncle is truly special, in a good way.

Janny stays on the sofa couch, fixated on his restless uncle who is so close to the television he could jump into it. Amidst the centre of the dark room, candles kindle.

Janny looks over at his mom who sees that her son is paying attention to her. She then appropriately grins, and the scars called wrinkles etched on her fragile face which were caused by hurt and low self-esteem shine delightfully with her good smile. Today, Cicilia promised her almost eleven-year-old son that she would not taste a sip of beer on this special occasion. She kept her promise. And Janny is grateful for that.

Janny knows why Cicilia drinks and sometimes understands the painful reason for it. Cicilia's drinking started being a daily routine when Sayo left her after she fell pregnant. As a ladies' man, Janny's dad Sayo decided to hide this Cicilia to chase after other pregnantless Cicilias. Soon Sayo married a gold-mine of a wife without Cicilia's knowledge. She only discovered the truth after neighbours jeered and judged her as she went for her maternal check-ups.

Cicilia always reminds Janny after returning from Queen's tavern late that it was his fault that his father left her and married as she was pregnant with him. It was as if Cicilia was mad at Janny more than Sayo for disappointing her fairy-tale dream. But tonight, this evening, Cicilia smiles soberly at Janny across the room as a black forest cake with candles burning, and her son reciprocates with his own thankful smile.

Aunty arrives in the room with a tray of sweets and snacks. She places it beside the birthday cake and asks the reckless uncle to switch off the television so they can start the celebration. Aunty seems like the only grown-up in this room who has her life in order. She is a good woman – a good wife Janny admires.

Aunty is different from the other women of the village. For the village wives would always shout and nag their husbands until the husbands finally succumb to the grilling by going to their nearest tavern and huddle up together and share their pain.

Good women always marry bad husbands. Uncle is self-centred yet has the epitome of a wife by his side, why? Birthday boy Janny wonders. How does the world behave? That is the question that the eleven-year-old boy will have to figure out when he is older. But today is a day of only smiles and happiness. With the television turned off and mom straightening herself up, uncle sitting, and the joyful aunty rejoicing, the celebration begins.

Everyone finishes, "... Happy eleventh birthday Janny! Blow the candles!" Everyone cheers.

Janny blows all the candles out and everyone claps their hands. Mom Cicilia kisses him on the cheek and he smiles.

The family is smiling. Tonight, Janny is smiling.





## Eldinah Hwengwere Akoh

*Eldinah Hwengwere Akoh is a Zimbabwean-born writer who resides in Durban, South Africa. She has been passionate about writing since the age of nine. Her father encouraged this and would take her to the Harare City Library on Saturdays where she entered children's writing competitions. She continued her writing as a hobby throughout her high school years, as part of the editorial committee for the school magazine. Eldinah's writing is diverse, ranging from poetry and prose to lyrics and short stories. She is a pharmacist by profession but is currently working on publishing her own book.*

# Khosi, What is a Man?

Eldinah Hwengwere Akoh

This is a story about a boy. A boy who grew and became a man, all by himself. A boy who battled and came out alive. A boy who was hurt, and in turn hurt many on his way to becoming who he is today. This is the story of a boy who sought direction and meaning in a world where it seemed absent for him, but available for others. This is the story of how a young man had to redefine manhood. It is not a beautiful story. It is not a profound story. It is my story. My name is Khosi.

I was born at home, in Khayelitsha in July 1983 to a single mother and three siblings. Everything from the water breaking to delivery happened so quickly, going to hospital was not an option. The neighbours helped my mother deliver and out came me. Her fourth child, her only son. I was small and frail. Well, that is what my sisters tell me. There are no pictures I can look at to refer back to, so I take their word for it. I grew up there, in Khayelitsha. If you know the area, I am sure you know it's a "close-knit" community. Not only are the houses packed close together, but the community is united as well. We did not have much, it is not like any of the four men who fathered the children in this household paid child support. This was not unique to my household either. My mom did odd jobs here and there to make ends meet. My clothes were "hand-me-downs" from the older boys who lived on our street. My mum would get them cheap, and I guess that is how women helped one another out.

I played on those dusty yet muddy and dirty streets. I made friends. We pushed our wire bicycles and made soccer balls from plastics we collected and tied together. We educated one another about nonsense and always went back home dirty and exhausted, knowing our mothers were going to complain and shout. Most mothers did, but not my mother. My mother barely spoke. Looking back, I wonder how she even managed to converse with four different men to build this family – but then again, that is none of my business. If she did speak, she was instructing that something be done or shouting that something was not done that should have been done. Her silence we interpreted as a lack of interest, and while as a kid you may get away with so much, you also miss out on the nurturing you so desperately need. So, we all grew up independent and probably more wayward than we should have been.

I did not get to go to primary school. I had to work and earn some money to help with our upkeep. "That is what a man does," Mama used to say. "But I am not a man," I used to mumble back, making sure she heard none of it. There really is only so much a small boy can do though. I washed blankets for the older ladies in the area. How? They would place the blanket in a big metal dish with water and soap, and I would step on it repeatedly for however long I was instructed to. It could be for hours, depending on the thickness and how dirty it was. It was tiring, but the old ladies sometimes gave me a sandwich with my small wage and that made it worth it.

I saw too much in the early years of my life. I stared hunger in the face many times. I was tasked with being a man and providing for a family long before my own voice had broken. Was this even "my" family to provide for? Where was my Dad, and why was he not providing for me? I looked as my mother became pregnant twice after me and how alcohol consumed her. I often took walks to the nearby tavern to get her favorite poison. I watched as my sisters followed suit, and all became mothers before they were eighteen. My eldest sister claimed she had been raped, but no one believed her. I saw sickness and death, as my mother and two younger siblings succumbed to HIV.

The men I saw in my community were not fathers. They were just men. They drank, they spread their seed, recklessly so, and they lived for no one but themselves. Themba's father seemed to be the only exception. He actually came home to his family when he was not away in the Northern Cape mines working. He bought Themba new clothes and took care of Themba's mother. He was the exception to the rule, but he was absent a lot.

"Khosi, is this you? Is this who you are going to become too?" My conscience did not agree with it, but I knew no better, and even consciences can harden. In my little caucus, we all had issues. We harassed women and raped a few girls – that is part of the nonsense us teenage boys talked about. There were no consequences for it, so why not? I robbed the very same old women I once washed blankets for. I too found comfort in the arms of alcohol and the embrace of "recreational drugs". My sisters lived their own lives. You could barely identify us as siblings.



# Khosi, What is a Man?

Eldinah Hwengwere Akoh

I found time to go to a youth center in Muzeinburg where I learnt how to read and write. I was nineteen years old then. Better late than never, I guess. I played pool and snooker there too. I even learnt how to swim and surf. I was terrified at first but quickly became a “water baby”. The youth center felt like an escape of some sort. It gave me the crazy school of thought that there was more to life than what I had become accustomed to. They offered other services, like counselling, which I probably needed, but I was not that far inclined. I cared more for the activities. I behaved while I was there. I never caused commotion unless another man tried to infringe on my space or give instructions. I preferred the female coaches.

To my own surprise, I excelled in surfing and swimming and got an opportunity to train as a lifeguard. At twenty-six, I got my very first job as a lifeguard. I also got opportunities to train young children to swim at various schools in Cape Town. I moved out of Khayelitsha into my very own one-bedroom apartment in central Cape Town. It was not fancy, but it was more than just an upgrade. It felt like heaven. At work, I was a loner. I did my job and made every effort to avoid any trouble. I was fortunate enough to work with a good team; everyone minded their own business.

I got in and out of a string of meaningless relationships. Some ran concurrently and ended just because of that. Most ended because of statements like these: “You lack affection”, “You are controlling”, “You are violent, especially when you are drunk”, etc. It did not hurt or bother me. It simply was what it was – a failed relationship. I did land in a police station once for domestic violence, but she dropped the charges. My respect for women was at zero and could only be matched by my hatred of anything that represented a father figure. I could not help it. Authority did not go down well with me, and I resisted it at all costs, though I also wanted to wield it as a sword over the women who came in and out of my life. Call it hypocrisy.

One day, one of the schools where I was coaching swimming students had an inter-school swimming gala. I attended to cheer my students on. Parents attended too. I envied these little brats. Their parents actually cared. They took time off from work for a swimming gala. I watched them cheering and embracing their children. Appreciating every effort, even those who came last. I left early and drove back to my apartment in my little Volkswagen Golf in tears. A thirty-year-old man weeping. I shocked myself! I had never been a crier. I wept like a child for a long time. For the mother I wished had asked me to come home earlier and to stay away from bad company. For the father I wished had cared what I would wear and eat. For the sisters whom I had lost touch with and never tried to love and protect. For the countless women I had abused, both physically and emotionally, leaving them trapped in pain, rejection and brokenness. I wept for myself. A man now but carrying pain and hurt for three decades.

I knew I wanted to be better and do better, but I truly had no idea how. No one had ever shown me. I thought back to Themba’s father, but even that was not close enough to emulate. I knew I needed to break the cycle; it was a matter of how. Moving away from Khayelitsha had separated me from my previous friends who in ways influenced me, but my brokenness did not care where I lived, it followed me. It resided in me. Alcohol for years had been a pleasant distraction, but never a solution. My newly found “wealth” couldn’t fill the void I had inside me, and it did not soothe the pain I carried. I needed more than that. So, I returned to the youth centre in Muizenburg. Not exactly a youth anymore, but feeling like one. Eleven years later, I was back to get the counselling I had so adamantly rejected. There, my journey to redefining who and what a man began. It started with crying, and now talking about the cruel past.

Now I know I am not a man because I have the strength to overpower, I am a man because I have strength to be able to protect. I am not a man because I can work and provide; I am a man because I choose to think beyond just myself and devote myself to those dear to me. I am not a man because I can donate sperm to procreate life; I am a man because I hold the ability to father and raise children. I am not a man because I can do whatever I want and not be held accountable; I am a man because I have the ability to be responsible and wise. I am not a man because I do not cry. I am a man because I have self-control and self-control is not the absence of emotion.

It has been a journey spanning over five years. Unlearning what I thought manhood was and realizing what it truly is. Teaching myself the value of each life and the importance of a family unit.

My name is Khosi. This is my story. A story of a broken boy who only ever saw the world through the lens of pain until Grace found him. Like I said, it is not a profound story. It is barely beautiful, but it is mine.







## Chaka Molapo

*Chaka Molapo is a Lesotho citizen completing his BA in philosophy at St. Joseph's Theological Institute, Cedara, in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. He holds Bachelor of Business (Hons) in International Business from Limkokwing University Lesotho. Chaka is a member of the congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (SCJ), and is in formation towards priesthood in the Catholic Church.*

# The Ancestors' Cry

Chaka Molapo

Her waters broke; she knew instantly that the time had arrived. Without any delay, she called her husband. At that very moment her torment began. Moramang came in unsuspectingly to find her leaning against the table. He knew by the water beneath her that her labour had begun.

He was a simple chap, usually out in his yard, disinterested in village affairs. This always saved him from gossip, although men would at times mock him, saying that he was like a domesticated animal. He had a little house of just two rooms: a kitchen and a bedroom. His wife had borne him a daughter, Nthabeleng, who was now six years old.

He hurriedly called the village mid-wife, *Nkhono*<sup>8</sup> Boithatelo, and another neighbour, 'm'e<sup>9</sup> 'Maitumeleng. The former had delivered about two-thirds of the village's middle-aged and young generation. She had performed the first delivery of 'Manthabeleng in this house before. She wasn't surprised by the call as she had been keeping a close eye on the expectant mother and knew that her time was imminent.

Moramang then went to get the reed from the pond by the corner of his yard. It had to be cut from the forefront reed, which was surely in water, for life is given by that which is in water, and in it is that vitality that was known to breathe and sustain the life of a newborn. This was to be placed on the top of the door as a symbol of the newborn. Whether there were one or two reeds indicated the sex of the newborn. Men were prohibited from going beyond this point until the time of the child's naming.

Having prepared the reed and fire to heat water, Moramang set off to inform his mother to come and help with the delivery and perform the birth rites of their clan. Upon arrival, with few words, he informed his mother, 'Mamoramang, of the situation. She stood up filled with joy and excitement. "We have a guest!" she jovially proclaimed with ululation. "May our great ancestors of *Bataung*<sup>10</sup> and the great *Molimo*<sup>11</sup> of our forefathers give us life. Oh, you with warm hands, your hands are white due to creating babies, you who stir water, may you splash water and give us life!" She sang while going to get her purse with some concoctions, beads, and the foot of a porcupine. These were to be used to invoke the ancestors' protection against evil spirits and as a sign of welcome of the newborn into the clan.

Moramang found his father under the shade behind the house and shared with him the news which the old man received with awe and jubilation. The old man was the exact opposite of his son. He was outspoken and would jump from one topic to another in a split second.

As the two remained together, the old man spoke at length on his lamentation over not having fulfilled his duty to give food to his father, who had appeared to him in his dreams. "Did I tell you of the latest dream?" he asked.

"No, you haven't," Moramang responded, initially disinterested.

"Your grandfather has appeared these past few weeks, crying bitterly that he is hungry. It has been countless times now, and I can't sleep anymore." He gave the harrowing details of the scenes in his dreams and the sad and enraged voice of his ancestor's cry. He was worried about his old age and his increasing dependence. His deepest fear was to die having not pleased his ancestors who would, in turn, refuse to welcome him should he leave the world of the living without heeding their call. It was such a great privilege to live a good life and to be welcomed and revered as an ancestor after death.

"All my livestock was cruelly shaved away by villainous villains years ago. Your grandfather was a well-heeled man who deserves nothing but a sheep for his satisfaction. I can't belittle him with a chicken. He will never be at peace!" The old man spoke with a strong voice filled with the command of an elder. He was tormented by the fear of punishment borne of his disobedience. It would be a curse for him to fail in his duty, and a great calamity might befall him. His deepest fear lay in his foresight of the fury that would manifest itself in incurable diseases killing him slowly and depriving him of a proper burial.

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<sup>8</sup> *Nkhono*: (*nkgono* in RSA Sotho) granny. An honorific title placed before the name of a woman of an elderly age in Sotho language.

<sup>9</sup> 'm'e: (*mme* in RSA Sotho) an honorific equivalent to Ms or Mrs.

<sup>10</sup> *Bataung*: "people of a place of lions". The Southern African Sotho-Tswana tribe descended from King Mohurutshe.

<sup>11</sup> *Molimo*: may take the form of *Modimo* in South African Sotho. A concept of the great ancestor in Basotho culture, who is the creator of all that is. Since African customs always define their notions within the system, *Molimo* is likened to a kind of water snake, thus water, rain, and reeds play a major role in the Basotho culture, and in this story.



# The Ancestors' Cry

Chaka Molapo

"I cannot risk waiting for too long. The ancestors' patience has long been put to the test, and they will delay to welcome me when I die. Come to my aid!" The words of the commanding old man went down to the abyss of Moramang's soul who meditated deeply and devoured every detail of his father's lamentation. The old man continued to warn his son about the danger to the expected child if the ancestors cried foul.

In a flash, Moramang put things together and saw how difficult things had become. He recalled that he had been unemployed for about a year and that, in a few months, Nthabeleng would be due to begin her first year at school. He felt cold blood run down his back as the amount of money required was projected in his imagination. He couldn't figure out any possible means available to him to respond to all these needs. He sat in deep thought, scratching and shaking his head. He had to make hard choices, as is always the case in life.

"Grandpa really picked a bad time. I am hardly making ends meet and Nthabeleng ought to commence her primary education next year. Yet my economic situation continues to see no improvement; only more depression." His response was honest and avoided empty promises. He could not commit to what he could hardly fulfil – an art which remained lacking in the multitudes of the mighty land, who took pride in uttering promises which never saw the light of day.

"We have a prior duty to the living, I suppose, especially the young ones. We should prioritise them. However, I will keep it in mind and try to make a plan," thus responded Moramang after considerable thought. This was a man who stood between sixes and sevens: he had a choice to make. He then remained paralyzed in front of his father. His great paralysis lay in the choice between the ancestors or his children's future. Only one could suffice.

The old man saw things differently. He was irritated and getting disappointed in his son whom he had raised so well. He saw in his utterances a deficiency, if not a deviation from the true precepts of their tradition. He could not understand his son's daring to demean the sacrosanct ancestors with the idea of choice.

"You cannot talk about the ancestors like that; they are the ones who give life and blessings. It is to them our priority ought to be given for we look up to and we live all our lives to be them. We are nothing without them. We are because they are. They are the end in which our becoming finds its meaning and fulfilment. They protect us and grant their blessings; they curse if they have to and bad luck befalls. They intercede for us to the *Molimo*, and rain falls and prosperity fills the earth. We have to acknowledge them, especially at this critical moment when they have to breathe life into the newborn. They are the ones to stir the water of life, and breathe into the child the vital principle, which by acknowledgement breathes and sustains life, lest the infant be exposed to all sorts of evils or find complications leading to its death." The old man responded sagaciously, hoping it would awaken his son who seemed to be in a cultural slumber – like many of us.

The mention of the child's need for protection caused some perturbation in Moramang, who took the advantage to ask for the child's name. "Thato is the name, whether a boy or a girl." The name was given momentarily, and Moramang knew exactly what it meant: the ancestors' will had to be fulfilled. Moramang wouldn't dare challenge the given name.

On the other side, the women were having a successful delivery. Ululations were heard as a sign of happiness. A handsome baby boy was born. The first bath was to be performed by the grandmother. The water was mixed with some herbs and algae collected by Moramang at the pond. The former was for protection and strength. To the latter belonged the source of life. It is highly regarded that life is given by that which is in water and in it there is vitality that breathes and sustains the life of a newborn.

*Nkhono* Boithatelo then took the infant carefully, looking for birthmarks and physical disabilities. Amid ululations and joy, the cry of the infant caught her attention. She then presented the infant to the mother who had been tended to by 'Maitumeleng. "Receive your present, fruit of your labour."

'Manthabeleng took her newborn gladly and dressed him up. She then pressed the first milk to the floor in acknowledgement of the receipt of the newborn. She mixed that milk with dust on the floor and made small crosses on the head, hands and feet of the infant so that the ancestors could easily recognise their gift as they pass by.

# The Ancestors' Cry

Chaka Molapo

'Mamoramang also came with some of her concoctions to anoint the infant and put the porcupine foot bracelet around his neck. She then went to dig a small pit by the entrance of the bedroom where the umbilical cord would be buried after it dried and fell off. The infant couldn't go beyond this point. The day was closed up, and the infant would be ritually named.

The infant continued crying as 'Manthabeleng gave him the first nourishment of breastmilk. The infant leapt jovially in receiving its nourishment. The cry then became like a benign melody of a well-played orchestra. But this calm cry was brief, followed by a violent cry of lamentation. *Nkhono* Boithatelo kept note of this cry, knowing that its meaning was still to be found.

On the other side, Moramang had been meditating upon the task he was called to fulfil. He finally broke the long silence: "I am still perturbed by what is our responsibility and to whom we ought to give it. In front of me, is a question of means to pursue the ends of my life. The ends are obscure and shady. My duty is torn between the most innocent, fragile and dependent of all on one side, and the other side characterised by the most demanding ones who have had a fair chance of their life." He continued, "Father, I have a baby being born. Enlighten me to what extent the ancestors can press on us a duty of offering food to them over the children? Above all, by a man who can hardly make ends meet! I am bamboozled by this situation."

"I envy your courage to question such a fundamental truth of our life, my son," responded the old man with awe. "Your inquiry is perilous and lacks timing. You are angering the grandparents with your lack of faith. These questions are never asked," the old man continued with fear of the fury of the ancestors, especially with the presence of a newborn who needed their protection. He offered a counter-defence: "Have you forgotten that you need to offer them a sheep for this child to be accepted in their clan? Will they accept if you are questioning their authority and duty due to them? You should be ashamed of yourself; we did not raise you to be like this."

The old man was bereaved by his son's sudden cultural dearth. He wondered how a simple young adult of the village, without any formal education or Christian influence, could dare challenge the ancestors. These were things heard of those who were educated and looked upon their culture as inferior or with embarrassment. Apart from the "educated" ones, are those who, through Christian baptism, were liberated from the shame of the "backwardness" of their culture, and proclaimed the gospel of salvation.

On the other side, Moramang wouldn't easily relent, but he was determined to seek understanding so as to live an authentic life with his people. He still had a strong thirst that he thought the old man, through his experience and wisdom, could quench for good. Yet, each answer seemed to increase his thirst and curiosity.

"I hear you father. I am sorry for making you question the way you raised me. Despite what you have said, you didn't provide any solution but brought more confusion. This is the right moment to ask these questions because it doesn't seem a choice like this can be made habitually, or in a manner you suggest. It seems more reasonable to take care of the living first. The ancestors had their time to live, then they passed on leaving us behind. If we had all the means, it would be easy to provide for our needs and theirs.

"If we do not give to the ancestors, they have power to cause harm. If we give them, I believe they have power to shower us with prosperity, wellbeing and protection. By having such enormous powers, I find it easy to believe that they have power to hold on for some time until we are able to satisfy their needs. Look, on the other hand, Nthabeleng is completely dependent on me; she lacks any power to dictate harm or wellbeing. She only has a will to be given a life well-lived, and it is us who can make that possible: to feed her, to clothe her, and offer her shelter and education. The newborn's dependency need not be mentioned.

"Furthermore, if we don't give ancestors food, will they be harmed in any corporeal way to the extent of dying again? This is what I know: Nthabeleng and the newborn will die if we don't satisfy their needs. They will live a short time and end in thin air. We would have failed them twice and denied them life either here or among the ancestors. To who, I beseech, do we owe an immediate duty?"



# The Ancestors' Cry

Chaka Molapo

There was pin-drop silence after these questions. While that seemed to be too much already, the tormented soul continued in his assertions which he fired endlessly like a machine gun in battle. "If the ancestors were very protective over us, why after having obeyed them all the yesteryears do I still live with poverty and unemployment? Wouldn't they be so considerate and offer me some more time until I am able to offer them some sacrifice and some schnapps? I wish I had a way to speak with them. I would humbly question them myself, maybe they would answer me satisfactorily, or at least take pity on me until the time I will be able to satisfy them. Maybe I am still young for them to come and demand of me like they do of you father. Could you speak on my behalf and present my case next time grandpa comes to you? If not, could you please ask him at least to come to me so that I can present my case to him?"

The atmosphere had changed. It was obvious that the old man had no answers. His reluctance to respond was not surprising at all. It is a common reaction of proponents of the sacred tradition which they received without question. He didn't only feel disrespected; his whole being was fully challenged and undermined. Throughout his life, he never dared to question even once his ancestral customs. The old man meditated on the misfortune which his son had just called upon himself. If ever he could repent, the old man thought to himself, things would change.

The old man's response was thus simple and straightforward, "You are old enough to bear the burden and curse you have brought on yourself. I have nothing more to say on this matter, except that they will speak for themselves." The old man spoke with a saddened voice as if he had not said anything substantial on the matter.

At that moment, jubilations were heard by the yard. 'Mamoramang charged to beat Moramang with her cane. What joy filled the hearts of the men who were in sorrow a minute earlier! With joy and happiness, he jumped up singing praises for the heir was born. Five years ago he was poured with a bucket full of water when Nthabeleng was born. Today a warrior is born, the heir to his household.

Upon reaching his house to meet his heir, he said praises which were received with ululation and whistles from neighbours who shared in the joy. A few men gathered to sing with him a sacred song dedicated to such an event. Creating a circle with their sticks held up high like victors of war, they chanted with an aura of victory that went deep inside the soul of the participants and the women and children watching.

Celebrating life was an integral activity for this community. Life was principled in unity, and the sharing of joy and happiness or the loss of a loved one. As they jovially sang, dust rose up like incense offered to the ancestors, and creation was in perfect unison. The sun went down rhythmically to the abyss of its resting place behind the mountains. The dust in the air at sunset gave it a more golden hue, and the sky faded out slowly under a thin cloud covering. They were gathering in this yard for the second time now; everyone appreciated this blessing. Little did they know that tomorrow they would gather at the same place singing a different song.

The crowd dispersed after a good time of raucous celebration. Moramang went inside to meet his son. He marvelled with joy and gave a handful of kisses to his son while he noted a unique vibrant cry which he declared would make the boy a good singer. To this declaration, Nkhono Boithatelo added that more is to be expected from that cry. Only then did others become aware of it. The orchestra of this cry got them all looking at each other. Nothing like this was heard of before; not even the experienced midwife ever met with this kind of cry. Nthabeleng marvelled at the newborn. Such a noise was never heard from a newborn before. They were all filled with awe.

In no time, all began to change. The baby started to cry out violently, and all efforts to embrace and feed him were hopeless. All the women took a turn trying to comfort the baby, but he cried more violently. An array of thoughts were shared and debated as to the cause of the sudden violent cry. They applied concoctions and burnt some shrubs which are used as incense to invoke the ancestors' spirits to heed and calm the child.

The fragile tiny chest couldn't hold much longer. The infant choked and his pain was so bad they thought there was damage to his organs. The thought of going to the clinic was the least. The nearest clinic was four hours walking distance during the day, and twice as long at night. It was now around seven in the evening. All the family gathered around without any suggestions. They were hoping against despair while the inevitable was becoming true. With a soft fading cry, the infant gave up. A daunting silence filled the house.

# The Ancestors' Cry

Chaka Molapo

The heir was gone. Bewildered and filled with disbelief, Moramang walked out sorrowfully without a word. 'Manthabeleng burst out in a loud cry that penetrated the horrifying quietness of the night. Nthabeleng was awakened by the loud cry of her mother. Careful not to let her see what was happening, 'm'e 'Maitumeleng carried her out before she was fully awake and went to lay down her in her house. After she slept for a while, someone whispered in her ear about the demise of her brother. Death was never directly told to children.

Villagers were now gathering at Moramang's house after the loud cry they heard. They could tell that, like many other African babies, the infant has passed on. They prepared a huge fire for warmth against the chilly Highland night and to boil water as they mourned with the family. Having informed the local chief, at dawn, some men went to dig a grave. The women remained in the house around the tiny covered corpse singing songs of consolation. Those who had joined a religion would sing religious songs filled with messages of hope and abandonment to God.

However, it was a feast also. Celebrating death, the only inevitable reality following birth, was a sacred feast. In the case of older people, it was celebrated as a farewell for one who had passed on to the realm of the ancestors. For a short-lived life like this, the soul was offered back to the chief ancestor, the creator.

The sun rose as the people gathered in the corner of the yard where the grave was dug. In peace he was buried. A few prayers were made followed by a sacred song, calling upon the creator to accept this soul and to graciously grant another child. No speeches were made for such a burial. When sunlight reached the village, it was all over. Everyone washed their hands in aloe-steeped water and went about their business.

It was a warm spring day. The family remained cleaning up and mourning together. Nthabeleng was greatly disappointed by the immediate disappearance of her singing brother. She persisted in questioning her mother. "Where did he go? I want to go to him and hear him," she said. She was tricked to go out and play with the other children.

It was just before five in the afternoon when shepherds were herding their cattle home from the fields adjacent to the village, and dark clouds were forming quickly. Rising from the south, they covered the whole valley in just a few minutes over unsuspecting children enjoying their afternoon play on the streets. Flashes of lightning followed by enormous sounds of thunder dispersed children who now felt threatened. Parents stood by their yards calling for their children to run home. Women hurriedly picked firewood to keep in the house before it rained. Some, like 'Mamoramang, hurried to remove clothes from the lines and on the kraal. The shepherds hurried their flock home for shelter. It was an African thunderstorm; the first of that spring.

Moramang stood outside, calling for Nthabeleng who was entering the gate running with all her might. She was full of tears. When the round of strong lightning struck, and the loud thunder followed, she stood paralyzed and cried even more. She then started off again towards the house. In the middle of the yard, a few meters from the house where Moramang stood waiting, another powerful lightning bolt struck, blinding his eyes temporarily.

It was a split second too late when he opened his eyes. Clearing his eyes, he perceived what he thought was a dream. He saw his little daughter lying on the ground, charred by the enormous strike of lightning. Running towards her with disbelief, he cried out in anger and knelt down before her with the greatest sorrow. It was a moment too late. She was gone.

Everyone in the house came out to find out what had transpired. It was already a great shock to hear such a loud cry from Moramang. 'Manthabeleng couldn't bear the sight of that lifeless body looking like a beast roasted on the fire; it broke her to pieces. She collapsed instantly. The old man approached with his only surviving sibling, Moramang's uncle, to try to help. It was too late; nothing could be done anymore to change the situation. 'Mamoramang and 'Maitumeleng, were busy trying to resuscitate 'Manthabeleng who had collapsed.

As for the men, it was unbearable and unbelievable. Moramang broke into tears, something that was hardly seen from a man in this community, for a man is a sheep, he doesn't cry. He had celebrated the love of his children; in response, death snatched them with a snap of a finger.



# The Ancestors' Cry

Chaka Molapo

His uncle ran into the house and got a blanket which they wrapped the corpse with. It was getting darker, and the rattling noise of rain nearby proved that it was approaching rapidly. Moramang was out of touch with reality. He didn't even notice the two men taking the body into the house. Just then it started raining. They helped to carry 'Manthabeleng inside the house and then took Moramang into the house, who looked like he had an encounter with a ghost.

"Why? Why?" he cried out viciously. The other two men remained quiet with their heads down. The heavy cloud of sorrow had befallen everyone. 'Manthabeleng gained consciousness and started crying bitterly once she reconnected with reality. "What wrong did I do? Why my children? Not in one day!" she asked endless unanswered questions. Other women tried consoling her while swallowing their sorrow. 'Mamoramang couldn't take it in either. She had lost all her grandchildren in one day. She wondered who could have bewitched this family. There was nothing else she could think of. In such villages, it is thought that everything has a cause which is certainly true.

Turning to the old man, Moramang charged, "Could you tell me please, look, my children are gone, in a snap of a finger, I have lost both of them. What have I done?"

The old man, tapping Moramang's shoulder, responded, "If you laid down your arms against them, it all wouldn't have gone this way. I warned you, but you wouldn't heed me. You can never go against our ancestors. Their fiery will is beyond measure and unstoppable."

"No! It cannot be! I do not accept it. Why did they do this to me? All I wanted was an answer. All I demanded was to know what to do," Moramang responded hopelessly.

"There is an answer now, although it had to come the hard way," replied the old man with conviction.

After a brief silence, Moramang lodged a new case. "They are no longer as good as you say they are. Their anger goes deep to the abyss of my heart. It draws all my soul out of me. If they were so hungry, how could they hit me so hard? They definitely have energy to hold on until I am able to provide for them. I never refused, what I did was only to question my responsibility, given the circumstances of my poverty. It is better for them not to be so that I can be free from blame or dependence. If it is them, then my trust in their protection and blessings is dead. They murdered it as they murdered my children. Today I have tasted a bitter cup of sorrow that shall never leave my memory. The cry of that infant haunts my mind and the sight of smoke coming up from the charred body of my daughter paralyzes me.

"All I have known is a hard life of poverty and unemployment. Where are the blessings? Look over there, my wife is not consoled, and in pain due to the mighty, hungry ancestors. No, let them not be so that I can be free. Or give me conviction that I can have a founded belief, not a forced one. What could I still render to them? I am nothing and possess nothing! Show me where to find them and let me do away with them. I will kill them all so that no one will ever feel this sorrow that I have. Couldn't they have chosen a better way to respond? Why, I ask, why? Father tells me to lay down my arms while I am armless and harmless. All I wanted was some light to brighten my darkness."

By the end of this long inquiry, the rain stopped, and the thunderstorm went away. The sky cleared up, and the full moon gave light to the night. However, the shadows in the valley surrounding the village left it in darkness. Neighbours could hear the cry of 'Manthabeleng. To some, it was mourning of her first infant's death, but curiosity over Moramang's fury left some puzzled. As the news spread of the happenings that evening, the whole neighbourhood was in great shock. Men and women gathered with hands on their heads, shaking them in disbelief. The question that is still asked to this day is who could have mastered this malediction.

Having cooled down, Moramang and the collage of men decided to wait until dawn to dig the second grave as the ground was too wet from the rain. A sad and tormenting vigil was held throughout the night. At dawn, the grave was dug quietly, and as the sun threw its first rays on the village, Nthabeleng was laid to rest, and the sacred song was sung once again.







# Ibrahim Babátúndé Ibrahim

*Ibrahim started reading at an early age, picking up his first James Hadley Chase novel at eight and, for the love of stories, was already done with both the Quran and the Bible by the time he was ten. He sees himself as a seeker and a truth-sayer. His works explore a wide range of topics including equality and slavery. He is presently working on his first book, a collection of short stories. His biggest influences include Chinua Achebe, James Hadley Chase, Jennifer Makumbi, and Elechi Amadi. Ibrahim writes from Nigeria. He can be found at @heemthewriter across social media. Ibrahim is the Africa Talent Liaison and Nigeria Country Ambassador for JAY Lit. He has helped immensely to increase the number of creative writing submissions from outside South Africa. If you want to help increase the amount of creative writing published in your African home language, country or community, you too can become an ambassador for the journal. Please get in touch with Ibrahim and the editor, Bronwyn King.*

# When the sun is up

Ibrahim Babátúndé Ibrahim

*Twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four...*

The headmaster's bell jingled to signal the end of his high-pitched tirade; an all too familiar rant that since lost its potency due to its frequency. The man's thick lips danced from shape to shape, his brownish teeth peeking through with specks of spittle flying all around his freckled face. The redness of his bulgy eyes was further pronounced with an army of thin red lines zigzagging through them.

It was the first day after midterm break and the headmaster had embarked on the laborious task of whipping all seventeen latecomers by himself.

The school's gates, rusty, sat between a clumsy cluster of unplastered bricks that was the fence. Facing the gates was a huge clock hanging on the side of a building. When the long arms of the clock arrived at eight o'clock, it didn't matter who anyone was; all who were unlucky to be on the other side of the fence got the whip.

This entire beating episode came just after the headmaster introduced a new student; a tall boy who stood out like a lone chalk mark on a blackboard, white-faced and transfixed as the headmaster's whip endlessly flung up and crashed into the backs of the offending and loudly wailing latecomers.

*Twenty-five, twen...*

*Stop... You are distracting me,* Ewa protested; a silent murmur beneath her breath.

At first, Soso paused, pretending to heed Ewa. The music teacher's flute was starting to render the introductory tune to the school's anthem, while the drummers were sounding out the solitary bangs that led up to the flurry of beating on their aged set of drums as the anthem grew on. Among the drums, there was a rusty pole sitting in between stones that held it erect, pieces of flat metal discs surrounding the pole near its tip, completing the set of beatables.

The entire assembly was soon chorusing the lazy lyrics of the school anthem. In the crowd of voices, Ewa could make out Soso's; thin like the stretched flesh of an inflated balloon, swelling into a bubble, effectively keeping the rest of the crowd out. She had started to count again.

Ewa knew the school anthem was just a few more slumbered lines to go before the assembly moved on to the national anthem, and then all the pupils would lift and stamp their feet one after the other in soldier mode for the country's soundtrack. Soso would get confused then and give up counting, instead switching to a vocal mimicry of the stamping of the many feet: *gba, gba, gba, gba...*<sup>12</sup> So, Ewa let her count: *thirty, thirty-one, thirty-two...*

The white-faced boy still stood rooted to his spot, his white face wearing a faint squint. His thin arms were clasped timidly before his iron-pressed shorts, and his long legs disappeared into plain black socks sprouting from a pair of *Kito* sandals. His bleached hair was well combed and he looked every inch like he had meticulously prepared for his first day, only to be shocked with scenes of brutal whipping that would make him ponder if he wanted to be there at all.

Ewa wondered if he'd noticed her. He, without doubt, shouldn't find it hard to see that in that small multitude, she was the only one that was truly like him; the only other chalk smear on that immaculate blackboard. She had her eyes on him before Soso seized them to count socks lined up in imperfect rows around her, and now that Soso was on '*gba gba gba*', she could finally look-stalk him again.

She maintained a gaze and waited for his head to turn off his now statue-like figure and look her way. All through the two stanzas of the national anthem and Soso's nagging chant of *gba gba gba*, he didn't, and a cloud of smoke fumed faintly around the walls of her mind, choking Soso and herself.

*Maybe he doesn't see in daylight,* Soso said, waving away a loose strand of smoke rising before her, and almost breaking into a cough.

Ewa mulled the thought, and then strained her eyes a little more, leaning forward to see if Soso was maybe right.

*But you can't know just by looking Ewa,* Soso mocked.

A mean laughter broke out just beside Ewa, lending sound to Soso's mockery. It was Chuka, a boy from her class. He was pointing a dirty-nailed finger at her, and infecting a few others with his mockery laugh.

'I told you she can't see when the sun is up,' he said.

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<sup>12</sup> The sound of the children's feet stamping against the ground.



# When the sun is up

Ibrahim Babátúndé Ibrahim

‘I bet that new one too can’t...’ rejoined another.

The assembly had dispersed and most of the other kids were already shuffling through the crowd of uniforms, toward their classes. Ewa pulled on the straps of her backpack to tighten it on her back and looked away from the boys, turning to escape into the boring class that would define her morning, till the loud and piercing clanging of the bell rescued her again at midday.

It was as she turned that she saw the new boy’s eyes centred on her; his long socked legs slowly moving him forward in her direction.



Soso had positioned herself at the windows of Ewa’s ears, bouncing off all other sounds in anticipation of the break-time bell. Ewa could see the teacher’s mouth locked in a lengthy dance as he taught the class, but she was deaf to it all, thanks to Soso.

Ewa could have pushed Soso off those windows, but the truth was she was just as excited as the entirety of her mind, and she too couldn’t wait for the break-time bell to toll. When it finally did toll, she didn’t have to go look for him.

She had just slotted her books into the raised lid of her desk when she looked up to find him looking in through a nearby window, his head framed in a space left vacant by several missing louvers.

‘I saw them laughing at you,’ he had said earlier in the morning after walking up to her and introducing himself. ‘Do they do that very often?’

‘Well, I don’t see when the sun is up, so I don’t see anybody when I’m here.’

‘So you can’t see me now?’ he asked with a hint of sarcasm.

‘You are not anybody. You’re like me.’ They both smiled their way up the flushed steps to the long corridor that stretched out before all the classrooms, joining the classrooms together. They agreed to seek out each other at break-time.

She studied him carefully as she stepped out of her classroom to join him on the corridor. She was used to the staring and the teasing. She could see they were doing the same to him now, but he didn’t seem to notice or care enough to show it if he did. His eyes had stayed on her and followed her all the way from her seat till she was standing before him.

‘The headmaster seems a little less angry now,’ he said as they walked side by side to the tuck shop.

‘How do you mean?’ she asked.

‘He rang the bell too faintly than he did in the morning.’

‘Oh... He only rings it during assembly, Chuka rings at other times.’

‘Who is Chuka?’

‘We both saw him point a dirty finger at me in the morning, laughing at me with his friends.’

‘Oh, I saw,’ he remarked jokingly. ‘But I thought you don’t see anybody when you’re here?’

‘In case you don’t know, albinos actually do see at all times, like everybody else.’

‘I should know... I can see you, and I can see the sign in the distance that says ‘tuck shop.’

Ewa laughed. The boy laughed. Soso laughed, infecting Ewa with more laughter. The boy moved the light grey centre of his eyes to the side where Ewa was, his expression wondering what else was funny.

At the tuck shop, they ate in silence for a while, and then he asked, ‘why does a bully ring the bell?’

She paused the grinding of her teeth, the food in her mouth stuck in mid-crush as she eyed him silently. Then she resumed grinding, swallowed and said, ‘he convinced everyone I can’t see in the afternoon.’

The boy’s grey irises lit up and shone brightly, ‘really?’

‘The student with the best result from the previous term rings the bell,’ she explained, ‘that was me, but I missed break-time on my first day, and he told the headmaster it’s because I couldn’t read the clock. His result was second best, so they replaced me with him.’

He listened silently, his bright irises gathering more gleam.

‘They will notice me less if I don’t have the best result this time, so I’ve stopped trying.’

He trudged his spoon all around the edges of his plate for a while, pushing his food from one edge to the other. The plate and spoon clatter was all the sound around their small table for a while, then his voice broke the silence again, ‘why did you miss the break-time?’

# When the sun is up

Ibrahim Babátúndé Ibrahim

‘Chuka asked me to help him copy a note. I was rushing to get it done, and he said he would help me with the bell.’



The next day, at midday, Ewa looked expectantly out of the classroom window, straining her ears for the sound of the bell, half expecting it not to ring. Soso swam around in her mind, break-dancing, waltzing, *shaku-shaku*, *zanku*, *gbese*,<sup>13</sup> happy that Ewa would see the albino boy again in minutes.

After school the day before, he had said before they departed, ‘I won’t let them ring that bell again, ’til they give it back to the right person.’ He had a rigid determination glued on his face.

‘I don’t want it,’ she retorted, ‘and you don’t want them to start with you.’

‘Where I’m from, they kill albinos for rituals. I’ve lived all my life there before coming here,’ he grimaced, ‘so, I’m sorry your scarecrows here don’t scare me.’

He was already walking away to catch the bus, his backpack hanging on to him like a turtle’s uneven shell.

‘Why then did you look like you would enter the ground when headmaster whipped latecomers during assembly?’ Ewa shot her words into his back. He playfully turned around to face her, still moving towards the bus, with his back to it.

‘I saw an albino in the line and I couldn’t imagine she was being beaten like that.’

Ewa had smiled, and she was smiling now when the bell rang. Soso was smiling too.

The classes emptied into the long corridor and the large field beyond it. The bell didn’t stop tolling and had started to feel like a careless alarm going off with reckless abandon. Ewa pushed her way through the bodies of uniforms standing in her view, ’til she was standing in front of the other students as they all glared at the tall albino boy. He was jingling the bell animatedly with both hands, while everyone else pulled on masks of surprise, holding their mouths apart to allow the masks to sit fittingly.

She didn’t see him again ’til the next morning at assembly. Soso wasn’t counting socks this morning. She was sobbing because the albino was being whipped. He had told the principal he rang the bell on behalf of the right ringer, and that further infuriated the man.

The bell wasn’t taken from Chuka, but the event gave confidence back to Ewa. She rejoined the debate group, and the quiz group, and the drama group. She had very little choice after the albino boy joined all three. The groups had all been sad to see her go anyway, except for Chuka, of course. He became the best they had after she left, and while everyone else was happy to have her back, he didn’t pretend to share their sentiments.

You see, the albino boy had a plan, and after sharing it with Ewa, she couldn’t deny that it was brilliant. That was why she allowed him to talk her into rejoining the groups. All three of the groups were already preparing for PTA presentation coming up at the end of the term, and that was perfect timing.

The debate topic was shared with Ewa, and her rehearsals began. She was to be the first speaker to debate before the crowd of parents and teachers on the day. The albino boy practised with her every break time. As it drew nearer, Soso’s panic grew, and Ewa almost pulled out, but the boy was always there, encouraging her, and reassuring her that it would all work out.

Ewa nursed no illusions that it would not be Chuka’s day when the results were announced, because it really was his. He bested his class, and indeed the entire school, and thus his bell-ringer status was retained. Ewa’s result came in at a distant third in her class, and eleventh overall. The albino boy did not bother with the positions. ‘I always do double figures, *big big* things...’ he joked when Ewa asked about his result.

Soso’s mood swung her from one corner of Ewa’s mind to the other. By the time Ewa stepped behind the microphone in the crowded hall for her presentation, Soso had withdrawn further and further into the shadows of her consciousness, enveloped in fear.

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<sup>13</sup> Popular Nigerian dances that have been big hits on the music scene in recent years.



# When the sun is up

Ibrahim Babátúndé Ibrahim

A thin voice filtered through the public address system, announcing the topic of the debate: Equality among Boys and Girls in Our Schools.

Ewa's heart pounded hard against the inside of her chest, but the excitement on the albino boy's white face spurred her on. She browsed through the sea of guests seated facing the stage 'til she saw her mother; a beautiful and bright smear of chalk, plastered boldly in the front-row of the blackboard that was her audience.

She cleared her throat and her voice filled up the brightly decorated hall, climbing into the ears of all within range, in and outside the hall, as she spoke into the microphone before her.

'Dear headmaster and distinguished teachers; our loving and able parents; my co-debaters; and fellow students... all protocols duly observed...

'The Yoruba word for beauty is Ewa. My name is Ewa, and I am a beautiful creature of God, just like you. My mother knows this, and you can tell by how she named me...'

There was a slight commotion in the debaters' corner on the stage; teachers and pupils turning to themselves, all wearing questioning expressions. No one tried to stop Ewa though, so she continued.

'...there are one hundred and twelve feet on the assembly ground; all from fifty-six pupils, including late-comers. Forty-eight of these pupils wear socks and eight do not. I know this because I counted them. I was able to count because contrary to what Chuka and the school believe, albinos can see when the sun is up...'

The headmaster sat aghast, anger and remorse struggling for space on his sweaty face. Blood drained into the thin lines in his eyes, turning them into tiny red ropes, making him seem like he was in some kind of pain.

Someone held out a white handkerchief to him. It was the albino boy. His white face beamed with smiles because he alone had heard that speech before, and he alone knew that it would end with Ewa asking to be installed as the bell-ringer in the coming term, and for an unreserved apology from the headmaster and the school.

As the thunder of applause for Ewa's speech subsided, Soso ceremoniously moon-walked out of the shadows in a gleaming Michael Jackson-styled leather outfit. She spun around to slide forward on both knees, just in time to see the back of one pupil running out of the hall, crying profusely.

The announcer called the next speaker, and everyone turned to look at Chuka. Some of the tears still sat on the edge of the wooden chair, drying gradually into the wood, but Chuka himself was nowhere to be found.







## Jacinta Moetlo

*Jacinta Moetlo has received an honourable mention for her short story "Perfect Timing" in the 2019 SA Writers' College short story competition. She completed a BCom in Accounting at the University of Johannesburg. The young writer from Polokwane draws her creativity from travelling, music, food and life as a boarder at Settlers Agricultural High School. She enjoys hosting dinner parties for family and friends when she is not bingeing on movies or taking part in marathons. This extraordinary human is a talented writer to look out for in the future.*

# She Fell in Love in Israel

Jacinta Moetlo

At the end of her photography exhibition, Mbali knew exactly where to take her next trip. After weeks of deliberating, surfing through travel packages; comparing them with her budget, she made her final decision, Israel.

Mbali always felt the desire to travel to places rarely visited. Places “red-flagged” due to crime, war and terrorism. “Unpredictable economies,” they called it. Painted ugly; it’s still a painting worth seeing, she believed.

Sunday arrived faster than anticipated. Her flight left OR Tambo International at 22:00 and arrived in Egypt the next morning. She tiptoed to immigration, where she encountered an unfriendly bearded man behind a glass counter asking questions about the purpose of her travelling to Egypt.

She thought about the gentleman back home who served her when she checked her bag in the night before, effortlessly smiling when he said, “Enjoy your trip,” with his coloured accent.

He stamped her passport quicker than she could read his nametag, his eyes staring at the next traveller in line.

The words “Thank you” rolled off her tongue as if he had said, “Welcome to Egypt”. But he was already opening the next passport.

Mbali couldn’t contain her excitement. Even after the seven-hour long flight, backache was a thing of the past. She grabbed her selfie-stick to snap her arrival. It would be a two-hour wait before she could get her next flight to Tel Aviv. Until then, she walked around the seemingly small airport, which is the busiest Egyptian airport, and circulated it in just fifteen minutes. Maybe it was only the area she was restricted to that was small, but busy.

Not new to Muslims within her society, Mbali had still never seen so many different colourful *hijabs* in one place when she entered the ladies’ bathroom. It was relieving to see someone smile with her eyes under her *niqab*, it felt welcoming, more so than her earlier encounter at immigration. Standing in the queue, she spotted a black woman, a sister she could relate to.

“Sanibonani.”

“Excuse me?” her American accent came back.

“Oh sorry, I was just saying hello.”

“Hi.”

Mbali hadn’t even left Africa, but in no way did she feel like she was in Africa. No resemblance, or even the slightest hint that Egypt was part of the motherland. She searched for *doeks* among the turbans that filled the passage. She was now back to the waiting area, facing the sand surrounding the former naval base, which was commanded by the American Forces more than fifty years ago.

Thoughts of what the next fifty years would look like filled her mind between the clock stares, flight updates’ board, and the ever-shifting positions on the cold iron chairs.

“Finally!” she sighed under her earphones when the boarding announcement was made.

Another checkpoint gave her an unexpected culture shock. She had to take off her shoes and was patted down by a female security guard. She didn’t know what shocked the guard the most. Was it her beautifully shaped rear end or the long black thick locks swinging with each turn?

After getting her handbag, cellphone and watch – which she had placed in a basket for scanning – she rushed to the bench to relieve her naked feet from the icy floor, put on her shoes, and then hurried to get onto the first shuttle bus.

Much to her surprise, Cairo International Airport was bigger than she initially thought; the snake drive to the plane took almost five minutes.

“Ladies and gentlemen, please pay careful attention. You will be required to identify your bag. Please do not remove it. Just simply touch the bag that belongs to you, and board the plane, thank you.”

This was the first time she had heard the words thank you spoken by an Egyptian airport official. The bags were all lined up in three rows outside between the shuttle bus and the plane which had the words Egyptian Airline spread across it in blue. Mbali spotted her bag from the window. Everyone before her boarded the plane after pointing it out from the first and second row.



# She Fell in Love in Israel

Jacinta Moetlo

Almost half of the passengers from the bus had boarded when it was her turn to exit, identify her bag, leave it, and get onto the plane. Not that simple for her. Her navy-blue luggage bag was standing in the third row, next to four other bags which had not moved. She confidently identified her bag; when she went closer to grab it without thinking, the security guard watching politely asked her to leave it right there.

“You can board the plane ma’am.”

“I can board?” She hesitated.

“Yes ma’am,” the clean-shaven Egyptian security guard said while showing the pathway to the door with his hand.

He was not like everyone else at Cairo International. Now it felt very strange. So long as it doesn’t turn into *Banged-Up Abroad* she thought. She turned and gladly stepped onto the 751 Boeing, and a smile from a handsome, green-eyed cabin crew member welcomed her on board. His face lingered in her mind during the flight to Tel Aviv.

When Mbali arrived in Israel, she spotted a man holding a sign with her name on it. She waved and cheerfully said “Hi.”

“Hello Ms, ah, Ms Em-baa-nee, Em-baa-lee, Grute... boo um...? Er, sorry... You will have to teach me how... Welcome to Israel! My name is Mike, short for Michael.” Mike looked perhaps in his late thirties.

“Hi Mike, it’s nice to meet you.”

After travelling for almost twelve hours to join the group of travellers, there was relief in her voice, relief which outweighed her uncomfortable feeling of not having bathed all day. It didn’t matter anymore; she was no longer alone.

Mike led her to immigration, helped her fill out a form, and proceeded to direct her to a group of eleven individuals who were waiting on her arrival.

“...and last to join our group is Mbali Grootboom,” Mike said nodding at me as he sought my approval for what I had just taught him, “from South Africa. Hello and welcome.”

Her small group was made up of four elderly Englishmen, two Irish sisters, two Asian couples, an American blogger, and herself: a twenty-six-year-old South African photographer.

For the first time in her life, Mbali was a minority.

The American blogger who Mbali shared a room with introduced herself as Samantha, twenty-two years old, and self-employed. She had a YouTube channel called “Sammy Tarot” on which she reads cards and mediates with the dead. She called it “spiritual guidance”.

“Oh, you mean like a *sangoma*?”<sup>14</sup> an inquisitive Mbali said.

“No, I don’t think so. I don’t even know what that is. I follow my intuition and spirits guide me. I burn sage, meditate and get signs from, like, the Universe. You know, like actual signs,” Samantha’s American accent filled the room.

“Ewe sana,<sup>15</sup> it’s like a *sangoma*. They throw bones and read them.”

“No, but like, my messages are really pure energy and love. It’s more of a feeling, vibrational feeling, yes, that’s what it’s called.”

“Even the *sangomas*, sana. There’re good and bad ones. Those that are good are also called traditional healers. The bad, it’s considered witchcraft,” Mbali elaborated.

“No, but like, what I do is not witchcraft, I don’t throw bones, I throw charms...” Samantha closed the bathroom door.

“Weird,” Mbali thought, “I’m in Israel and my roommate is a *sangoma*! *Thixo*!”<sup>16</sup>

After settling in and getting a much-needed shower, Mbali joined the group for a late lunch in the hotel restaurant.

“It’s a Kosher diet, ladies and gentlemen,” Mike said when he met up with the group.

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<sup>14</sup> A traditional healer or diviner in Southern Africa.

<sup>15</sup> Yes baby.

<sup>16</sup> God!

# She Fell in Love in Israel

Jacinta Moetlo

Mbali walked slowly around the buffet table, worried that Kosher meant something terrible; she saw that all the food there was edible. When she got back to the table, she quickly googled what Kosher meant and found that it had nothing to do with her guava allergy and so she didn't hesitate to go back for the hummus.

Lunch ended with a round of introductions and Mike confirmed the itinerary for tomorrow.

"Breakfast is served from six o'clock, and everyone to please meet me at reception at eight o'clock."



The smell of burnt sage filled the air, an echo getting louder and louder, eyes slightly opening to the sound of humming and chanting...

"...spirit we ask for your guidance this morning, what is the message for the day...?"

When Mbali finally woke up, sitting upright in her bed, she saw Samantha kneeling between the twin beds, two candles lit with cards laid across the floor. Samantha's eyes were closed, waving burning sage over the cards.

Shocked and irritated, Mbali leaned from her bed and said harshly, "I go to a *sangoma* for ancestral advice; a *sangoma* doesn't come to me!"

Mbali grabbed the sage, her brown stockings still tied on her head, stormed to the bathroom, and flushed it down the toilet.

Silence filled the room while both ladies were getting ready for breakfast, their eyes locking between excuse mes and sorrys while getting around their clustered bedroom.

Mbali made her way to the dining area. She saw a few of her tour members sitting having breakfast, she waved and went straight to the buffet table.

"Good morning," Mbali said, taking the last seat at the six-chair table, glad that she didn't have to share her meal with the *sangoma*.

Like a disorganized choir, mouth-full, everyone responded, "Morning... Hello... Hi there..."

They all seemed to have had a good rest, considering that every one of them came from different locations and the long hours spent travelling. They were very happy to see Mike come in for a cup of coffee.

"Great to see you all looking ready! I could see the exhaustion in your eyes, the eyes never lie," he said with a smile, looking at the faces smiling back at him.

After breakfast, they spread out to their rooms to grab a small handbag, catch a pee break and their water before meeting at reception. By eight o'clock, they were on the bus headed to Magdala, a place known for fishing, salt, and boat-building.

They stopped for lunch at a garage, the parking filled with buses, and many tourists from across the world filled the canteen. German, French and even Irish were some of the languages Mbali had to shout over to place her order at the counter.

"Hi, can I please get a chickpea falafel..." she asked while searching for a five-dollar note in her purse.

"One chickpea falafel for *habibi*," the Arab man behind the counter said.

"*Habibi*? What does that mean?" Mbali asked.

"It means my darling. Make it two," Mike said behind her.

"Oh, hi, I didn't see you behind me."

Mike moved and stood beside her while they waited for their lunch.

"Did you get good pictures?"

"Yes, they look great. Even the multi-coloured mosaic floors made it onto the screen. It's one thing to read the miracles in the Bible, but a whole different experience to see these places."

"Very true, one can only imagine what it was like over two thousand years ago. I bring many tourists to see the place of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, but it still feels so unreal to me."

"*Shukran*,"<sup>17</sup> he said when he took both orders and led her to a table.

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<sup>17</sup> Thank you.



# She Fell in Love in Israel

Jacinta Moetlo

Mike was an Israeli-born Christian Palestinian. His family home, along with many other Palestinians' homes, had been destroyed when he was a young boy. They were forced to relocate further away from the city. The heartbreak showing in his shining black eyes while he spoke of the few good memories he had as a child was hard to miss. Not even a photograph could tell how deep the scars were, but his eyes, paging through an old album only he could see, made it hard for him to continue.

On their way back to the hotel in Nazareth and after a late lunch, Mbali took a seat behind the bus driver Jalal. He was also an Israeli-born Christian Palestinian, and almost the same age as her.

The group spoke about their family dynamics, some Jewish-Palestinian marriages and Muslim-Christian celebrations that seemed to overlap, and laughed about the many dietary requests that had to be accommodated on special occasions.

"There, that's where I grew up," Mike nodded ahead from behind his MIB shades.

"Over there? Really?" Mbali responded in shock.

There was nothing left, not even rubble, showing that there once was a home across this piece of flat land. The sound of the twenty-seat minibus filled the atmosphere, laughter from the back, a sigh from Mike, and back into town they headed.

"Remember to pack your bags tonight, because there won't be any time to do so after breakfast. Tomorrow, we leave for Bethlehem, which we'll call home for the next four nights," Mike announced as soon as they arrived at the Golden Crown Hotel in Nazareth.

Going through her photos while walking to the room, Mbali didn't pay attention to anyone around her. It had been a long day, visiting the Primacy of Peter, the Mount of Beatitudes and Capernaum. One of her highlights that day was a boat ride on the sea of Galilea.

She got to her room and found Samantha already packing. They hadn't said much to each other since the morning's "spiritual guide invasion".

"Supper's from five, *nè*?"

"Yes, it is."

Samantha's response was not as cold as Mbali expected. An ice-breaking intro was all they needed. They giggled on their way to supper where Mbali finally had a conversation with everyone else within the group, sharing stories about their travelling experiences. She started to feel happy about the trip again.

That evening, lying in bed, Mbali couldn't stop thinking about Mike's old home. Forced relocations and settlers invading land were thought to be a thing of the past. History repeating itself, taking a different shape, and not driven by race, but by culture and religious beliefs. Similar, yet different, but still oppressive, and the world is surprised why politicians speak of land expropriation. Healing is difficult when the scars are so vivid.

"I promise not to hum too loud tomorrow," Samantha said in the darkness.

"Okay, *sana*."



It was a rushed morning. The two ladies had stayed in bed longer, chatting about their different worlds. Mbali had never been to America but felt that the movies gave some sense of what life would be like in the USA.

Mbali packed everything and left her suitcase outside the room door. She made her way to the dining area where she stuffed her face with croissants; she hated being late. When she climbed onto the minibus, she noticed Jalal's green eyes. He smiled.

"Good morning."

So, she sat behind him.

"Hello and good morning to you all once again. I hope you're ready for today. We'll be in Bethlehem for the next four days. Giving you a good rest after the continuous packing and unpacking you've been doing," Mike announced in the minibus.

Mbali readied her settings on her cameraphone for the heart of religion.

# She Fell in Love in Israel

Jacinta Moetlo

The next four days were filled with visits to St Joseph’s workshop, Cana – the location of the change of water into wine – and the Basilica of the Nativity, where YouTube videos show religious men fighting with sticks in the Holy Place.

She visited the Church of All Nations, Mary’s Tomb, and Calvary. With every day she marvelled at the sights of the Western Wall, the Dome of the Rock, and the Holy Sepulchre. In four days, Mbali visited the most sacred and holy places where the authors of the Bible lived centuries ago.

Of all she had seen during her stay in Bethlehem, nothing stood out more than the West Bank wall. Segregating a society based on their religious and cultural difference. And yet not even the Israeli soldier, searching the minibus at the access control point with a rifle in his hand, shocked her.

How cruel are one’s intentions to control and impose laws that in-dignify a human race? She captured it all, through lens and clear eyesight.

In the conversations between her, Mike, Jalal, Samantha and the rest of the tourists who she warmed up to eventually, she felt a general sense of compassion filling the atmosphere. Each culture, country and race has suffered at the hands of people in power. However, everyone seems to have planted rose bushes, despite the external factors, to add happiness in a life full of uncertainties. That’s brave, she thought.

During the last supper with strangers who had become friends, Mbali set up her cameraphone, and she smiled in front of the lens with her companions just in time for the flashlight. From Tel Aviv to Cairo, the group connected by scars, spent one last afternoon together visiting the Pyramids of Giza.



Flying back from Cairo to OR Tambo International, Mbali’s forehead rested against the cold window. She counted the three Pyramids of Giza below, remembering the rough sand between her toes, the ancient stone she touched, and the darkness at the mouth of its entrance. She felt a heaviness inside during the ascent, a heaviness which had little to do with the rough turbulence or the largely intact Pyramids which soon vanished.

The heaviness was the longing to be back home. Though her body was mid-air, maybe over Sudan, her mind was already in OR Tambo International. She imagined herself landing safely and passing the crowded queue for immigration. In her mind, she had already greeted security on the patrol cart in vernac. There would be no forms to complete, no patting, no undressing, and no cold surfaces.

With her head now pressed against the SAA printed headrest, she searched for a comfortable posture. Trying hard not to press her African curves against the passenger on her right, she covered her face from the bright TV screen showing the plane flying over Uganda.

In between the short naps, Mbali pictured her next connecting flight to Cape Town filled with the clicking sounds of her mother tongue, like a marimba playoff, loud enough to command attention but pure enough to sense love with every rhythm.

A shuffle to the left, bum against the cold wall of the plane. She had to check, it had been hours, but the dim light in the plane and snores remind her that she’s still a little too far from home, but flying over Tanzania, a country she hoped to visit soon.

“Excuse me ma’am, we’re about to serve breakfast. Would you like coffee or tea?”

Mbali woke up from an uncomfortable sleep. She caught a glimpse of the plane’s current location. They had just entered South Africa’s borders at its northern-most province, Limpopo, the land of the fruits. The brightness of the African sun pierced through the clouds, a warm good morning kiss she welcomed with a deep breath.

“Welcome to OR Tambo International Airport, thank you for flying with SAA...”

The pilot’s announcements faded in the back of her mind as she gathered her belongings. Before the plane could come to a stand-still, she and half the other passengers were standing heads tilted to the side and backs slanted. Minutes later, the doors opened, rushed feet dragging bags, everyone eager to get on with their lives after being confined in one space for too long.



# She Fell in Love in Israel

Jacinta Moetlo

Mbali paced past the crowded conveyer belt snail, trying not to think the worst since she last saw her luggage in Tel Aviv. Marching past hundreds of people, feeling like Wonder Woman on a mission, she headed to catch her domestic flight to Cape Town.

Sitting on the iron chair, breathing heavily, and staring at the C6 gate screen for Flight MN133, departing in forty-five minutes, she could barely feel the cold sting through her buttocks. She was glad she had checked-in mid-air.

“I need another cup of coffee,” she whispered to herself.

A cold breeze hit her chubby cheeks when she got out of the bus to board the bright green Kulula flight, the plane was heavily packed in a multilingual atmosphere along with occasional excuses and apologies for occupying the wrong seat. Window seat right at the back was what she had hoped for. There’s nothing more uncomfortable than occupying the middle seat with hips that don’t lie.

The cold aircon at her ankles reminded her of her recent shoeless check-in experiences. Airports are incredibly odd, awkward places; arriving with the entire purpose of getting away as soon as possible.

She saw Robin Island in the distance, was reminded of the history of shackles, and then she looked down at her camera to see a picture of the wall built to confine the Palestinians, the present shackles.

The freedoms in one country to practice any religion, to marry across culture and race, even to travel across borders, were privileges Mbali embraced. South Africa may not be perfect – like the shape of the “Table” Mountain, which is rocky and not like a table you would want to use – where finance ministers are employed for three days, presidents recalled, and questions about a drought in a city bordered by the sea are still unanswered.

Though many would label her country as politically unstable, infested with HIV, and even poverty-stricken, it didn’t matter to her what the world thought. It only mattered what she thought of her home. One’s perceptions of one’s own surroundings and what one does in the moment will either contribute to the suffering or alleviate the struggling.

Here she was, looking down at Table Mountain, a wonder of nature, in a nation where people across the globe flocked to the biggest and busiest airport in Africa – OR Tambo International. It didn’t matter anymore that The Star of Africa from Kimberley was sitting in London along with the souls of Africans who died mining minerals out of the motherland.

She felt sad listening to the lyrics from “Now or Never” by Sankomoto.

...Vuka baba, Vuka, Life has been passing you by, follow your star, it’s now or never

Hayi, you’ve got to make it better Vuka baba, Vuka...

Irony, she thought, to visit places of poverty, crime, injustice and oppression outside of her country, only to look forward to coming back home where some people are still in the same chains.

She put her earphones in her backpack and waited patiently for the passengers to walk out while she cleared her throat. This was Cape Town, calm and laid-back like the sea, but dangerous just like the sea. The joy she felt when she saw her big blue luggage bag presented to her overcame the back pain she felt when carrying and placing it onto the trolley.

The Uber she called had arrived just in time to meet her at the door. The driver swung the luggage bag into the boot like a Frisbee. The heater was on, and she asked him to put the volume of the radio higher.

“Khayelitsha, right?” the thick French-speaking Nigerian accent asked with a smile.

“Ewe,” she said, resting her back in the far right behind him.

Good Hope FM filled the fast-moving silver Toyota with a welcome home jam she nodded to.

I roll with salutas that’s why the ouens salutas...<sup>18</sup>

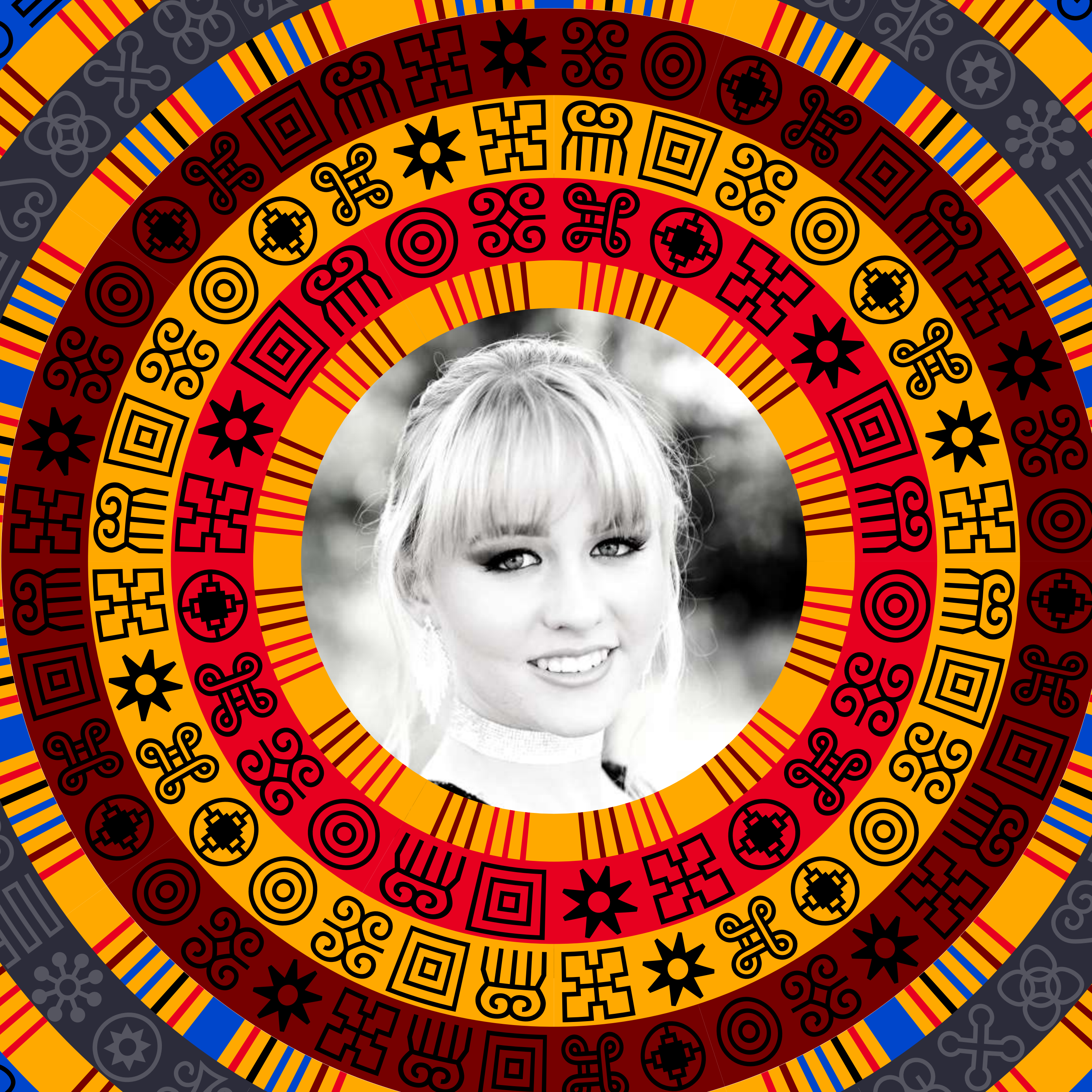
Mbali didn’t realize it; she fell in love in Israel while thinking about Africa.

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<sup>18</sup> “Salutas” by YoungstaCPT.







## Amy Jane Lubbers

*Amy is an aspiring 18-year-old South African writer who began dreaming up and writing stories in high school. She often finds herself comfortably lost in the world of any book she can get her hands on. Through her writing, she wishes to capture the multifaceted nature of humanity and inspire others to be themselves, love themselves, and always speak themselves. She also adores animals and spends her free time at a local animal shelter. Contact: [ajlpersuasianart@gmail.com](mailto:ajlpersuasianart@gmail.com)*

# The Poem of 99: Sunset Road

Amy Jane Lubbers

*The air was thick and brackish, and the wind cried in Edin's ears. Normally he would have found such a high-pitched sound maddening, but this time its monotonous song blocked out the other noises he hated to hear...*

It had been Midas and Willem's idea to leave. "To drive until we reach the sunset," Willem had said. Being the eldest of the five, they knew better than the rest what life was really like. Dougie impatiently dragged Edin by his sleeve down the orphanage stairs with a tremendous racket. A racket that fitted the moment far better than Edin's orange shirt fitted his chest. Edin was a quiet coloured boy made more bone than meat, whose slight build meant the oversized clothes donated to the orphanage often didn't fit him. Simon's hoarse ululations echoed through the old building's halls, and Edin knew then; it was going to be something magnificent. It would be a moment in time that would be etched in the boys' memories.

Dougie squealed with delight.

"Willem and Midas bought a car!" he exclaimed. "It's a Cortina Estate, Edin." Dougie placed Edin's fawn hand on the tepid bonnet. To Edin, a Cortina was just another growling metal lump. He would have loved to experience the same elation his 'brothers' felt about the car, but he simply couldn't. To Edin, all cars looked the same. That is if they even looked the way he imagined them, for God had not blessed him with the joy and beauty of vision, but rather damned him to eternal darkness.

"What colour is it?" Edin asked shyly. Although it meant nothing to him, he at least wanted to show an interest in his brothers' success. He felt Midas' arm wrap around his shoulder.

"The ocean," Midas replied. He couldn't miss Midas' voice – there was something comforting in its exoticness. Edin's teacher had told him that Midas' peculiar accent was because his father was a Chinese man and his mother a coloured woman.

"The teal of tropical waves that crash onto the pebbles," he continued. Edin didn't know what either of those descriptions really entailed, but he sensed that Midas found it beautiful. And as far as he was concerned, whatever Midas found beautiful so did he...

*Teal.* Edin huffed and groaned. Miss Knight looked up from her work, startled, "And then, Edin?" Miss Knight had been the only teacher at the local school to bother with him. The day she arrived in the dank classroom, she brought light into Edin's empty world. He recalled how she had leaned over his desk and asked him if he needed help. The satin cloth of her loose shirt brushed against his arm, and her elegant rosy fragrance made his senses dance. Her fragrance wasn't the cheap sticky one that Midas' fiancée wore – that putrid one that suffocated him and made his nostrils burn.

His previous teachers had often found that his disability inconvenienced their teaching style, so they merely thrust work onto him, expecting him to "*maak 'n plan*"<sup>19</sup> before calling him "stupid" or "a dunce" when he failed to complete the task. Miss Knight took a special interest in him. She understood the financial situation of the orphanage and offered to teach Edin for free. He stopped attending the school and for the last three years had been taught by Miss Knight instead in the late afternoons and on weekends. Edin thrived on the individual contact and was hungry to learn. It wasn't long before the creative embers began to glow in him; Miss Knight had found in him a literary prodigy. But creativity came with a hefty price for someone who couldn't see the things he wished to describe.

"How does teal smell?" he asked frustratedly. He assumed by her silence that she couldn't think of an answer, so he changed his question.

"How does the ocean smell?"

"Indescribable. Something between warm, crisp and salty. It's fresh like no other air," she said, closing her eyes and savouring the moment. Edin had never been to the beach, and the only air he knew was of his Karoo home, Albertinia. The mist that rolled down the mountains at dawn and the thick smell of *tamatiebredie*<sup>20</sup> in the afternoons. As definite and unchanging as the people on their stoeps drinking whisky and *soetwyn*<sup>21</sup> as they lead the same dull lives in this *klein dorpie*<sup>22</sup> as the generations before them. Edin's mind wandered.

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<sup>19</sup> Afrikaans: Make a plan.

<sup>20</sup> Stew usually made with mutton.

<sup>21</sup> Sweet wine.

<sup>22</sup> Small town.



# The Poem of 99: Sunset Road

Amy Jane Lubbers

“What about Cape Town’s air? Cape Town is by the sea. Is its air fresh?” he asked.

“To an extent, yes. It’s not as fresh as the air of a tropical Eden,” she replied.

“Why’s that?”

She smiled at his curiosity. “There are lots of people, cars and buildings in Cape Town which produce smoke. It makes the air sad and heavy.”

Edin contemplated this for a moment. “Sooo...” he began slowly, “It’s like when Midas has a smoke behind the bicycle shed and tells me not to stand too close because it’s bad for me.”

“Midas shouldn’t be smoking at the orphanage,” she said solemnly.

“You won’t get him in trouble, will you? He says he can’t help it because he’s addicted.”

She chuckled. “I guess not.”

“Does that mean the people in Cape Town get angry when they leave?”

Miss Knight looked at Edin in confusion. “Why would they get angry?”

Edin frowned. “Well... not angry... grouchy. Like Midas. Midas is always grouchy when he gets home from school because he can’t have a smoke at school.”

“Oh, Edin,” she chuckled, “People aren’t addicted to the air they breathe.”

She ambled towards him. She picked up a sheet of paper with scrawly handwriting that lay next to his braille dictionary. “What’s this?” she asked.

“It’s a poem,” he said, “About Midas’ fiancée.” She frowned as she read the poem. He couldn’t see it, but he sensed she was frowning. He learnt that most adults did when someone told them a harsh truth.

“It’s not a very nice poem.”

“Well, I don’t really like Bianca, and sometimes the truth isn’t very nice, but you have to face it.” Miss Knight couldn’t dispute his argument.

“Just make sure she doesn’t see it. It might upset her,” she suggested.

“It should upset her,” he replied bitterly before rising from his seat with his braille dictionary in his hand. He greeted his teacher with a warm hug and left with his hand trailing against the cold jonquil painted wall.

Edin’s fingers followed the strip of peeling floral wallpaper that ran through the centre of the wall, to the matron’s office where he heard Dougie’s voice. Dougie’s small shadow drifted out the doorway.

Dougie stood before the large downtrodden woman as she twirled in the tattered mauve chair in her office.

“What’s wrong, Mrs Du Randt?” Dougie asked sympathetically. Her pudgy face was twisted in a sad expression. She shook her head.

“I can’t find my brooch. You know the white butterfly...”

“With the gold trim,” Dougie interrupted, “Your guardian angel...”

She nodded. Edin appeared suddenly in the doorway behind him with his braille dictionary under his arm. He’d just finished his lessons.

“What is that cheeky grin for, Edin?” the matron asked.

He chuckled and shook his head. “I was expecting you to ask if I’d seen your brooch.”

Mrs Du Randt smiled meekly. She knew he couldn’t possibly have seen it.



For the boys, leaving the orphanage was like leaving an unhealthy relationship. You know that when you leave, you’ll be walking into sunlit fields of new hope. But before you make that choice, you sympathise for the person you’re leaving behind in the once shared abyss where the grey tides are still snapping at their heels like a wolf. In the end, it came down to what the boys valued more: themselves and their futures or their sentimentality for the hell hole they grew up in.

The matron had difficulty keeping her fountain of tears under control as she babbled her farewells to the boys. She ruffled Dougie’s neat russet undercut affectionately as he hugged her. A smile fluttered like a butterfly on his lips. It was a smile so magnificent that it left you in a heavenly euphoria, yet simultaneously so fragile that it could be crushed in your hands and lost in a matter of seconds. She placed her hand over her chest where her small porcelain brooch would have sat.



# The Poem of 99: Sunset Road

Amy Jane Lubbers

Willem chuckled, “Call us if you find that brooch of yours Ms Du Randt. I’m sure it will turn up somewhere.”

She hugged him. “I have no doubt my boy.” She wiped the tears from her eyes and smiled broadly.

After Willem and Simon had hauled the last the trunk into the boot of the Cortina, they left the small Karoo *dorpie* of their childhood and set off in pursuit of the sunset.

They were barely past Stilbaai when Midas and Willem had one of their routine clashing of horns. The ever-impatient Willem was sick to death of Midas’ scenic route. *Honestly*, Edin thought, *they’re worse than Rottweilers in a ring*. The coast road was poorly maintained, causing the Cortina to rattle infernally. The road was laced with exquisite jewels of coastal beauty and so enthralled Dougie that he ignored the rattling and spent most of his time in the boot, nose pressed to the back window, peering out at the picturesque landscape.

“Can we just get back on the N2!?” Willem yelled as he knocked his head against the window for about the fifth time.

“It’s not that bad, Willem! Get over yourself,” Midas retorted. Suddenly Willem lurched out of his seat and grabbed the steering wheel. The teal Cortina swerved violently into the empty oncoming lane.

“WILLEM!” Midas screeched. He writhed with the much stronger Willem until finally, he managed to thrust him off and regain control of the Cortina. “*Jy’s blerrie mal!*”<sup>23</sup> he cried. Indignantly, he turned onto a side dirt road and put his foot to the floor. The sand and rocks skipped up at the teal metal. Midas braked suddenly just as the road reached the outskirts of a milkwood forest. The dust settled around the car and Midas glared out of the windscreen. Suddenly, everything was still.

Eventually, Midas clambered out the driver’s seat, slamming the door behind him. The others silently followed suit. Midas sprawled an old map out on the ticking bonnet.

“Tell me what you want to do Willem,” he said, gesturing to the map.

“I need to pee,” blurted Dougie who had decided to put considerable distance between himself and his two furious older ‘brothers’. Midas looked back over his shoulder at him.

“Go pee in the bushes over there,” he replied. “Take Edin as well,” he added before turning back to the map.

After they’d relieved themselves in the thicket on the edge of the milkwoods, Dougie and Edin strolled down the soft white sandy trail. Dougie tugged on Edin’s sleeve.

“Do you hear that?” Dougie whispered.

“What is it?” Edin asked, nodding.

Dougie smiled broadly and breathed in the cool summer air.

“The sea! It’s the sea, Edin!” He said ecstatically. Suddenly, Dougie turned heel and rushed back to the Cortina. Edin stumbled behind him, jogging as quickly as his could.

“Midas!” Dougie shouted. Both Willem and Midas looked up from the map.

“Can we camp here?” he asked with a broad innocent smile spread across his face.

Willem’s eyes widened. “Camp? It’s barely two! We need to carry on driving.”

Dougie’s face dropped. “It’s just... the sea is right there... and we’ve never seen the sea properly...” Midas seemed to consider this for a moment.

“Why not, Willem?” Midas said eventually, “It’ll give us time to agree on a route, and the boys can enjoy themselves for a while.” Willem sighed and admitted defeat.

The serpent’s tongue leapt from the wood and licked the star-speckled sky that evening. The boys huddled around the fire for warmth. They were wrapped in vintage floral blankets that had been given to them by the orphanage. The raucous harmony of Midas’ strong voice drifted amidst the treetops as he attempted some popular pop songs. Dougie joined in on an off-tune note sending them all into fits of laughter. He collapsed in the sand next to Edin, giggling. He slipped his hand into Edin’s and pulled the blanket over their shoulders... The quiet before the storm.

Suddenly, a pot clanged. A scuffle. A guttural yell and a desperate cry. Overwhelming and all at once. Edin jolted. Midas rose suddenly and stared in the direction of the noise.

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<sup>23</sup> You’re bloody mad!

# The Poem of 99: Sunset Road

Amy Jane Lubbers

“*Ek gee nie ’n moer om!*”<sup>24</sup> Willem growled through his clenched jaw. He clutched Simon by his collar and thrust him towards the campfire. Simon crashed into the ground, biting the rocks and dirt. The fire’s light struck his ginger hair in such a way that it seemed as if he too was aflame. He crawled to his knees, his nose dripping with crimson blood, and he cowered in the shadow of Willem’s foreboding figure. Willem lunged for the frightened boy, but Midas wrenched him away, cursing and yelling. He shot one last glare full of daggers back at Simon, before following Midas away from the camp. The trees gossiped. “Hush. Hush,” they whispered.

When Midas return, he found Dougie staring into the fire, biting his fingernails.

“Come for a drive with me, Dougie. It’ll help clear your mind,” Midas suggested.

Dougie smiled meekly. He was knackered, but he agreed anyway.

Midas often tried to keep Dougie and Edin out of his commonplace arguments with Willem. Edin realised that because he was blind, people seemed to think he was naïve and, on many occasions, deaf too. He quickly learnt to use this to his advantage, allowing him to slip into the background of arguments. He knew more than people thought.

In fact, he was the only one who knew the whole truth. With bare feet, Edin padded lightly across the wooden floor. He’d learnt which walls to follow if he wanted to be invisible, and which to follow if he wanted to be noticed. He leaned against the wall outside Midas and Willem’s room and listen to the low growling argument between them. Even when he was irritated, Midas’ tone was never as harsh as that of Willem’s.

“You can’t take him to a place where it is easier for him to access tik,” Midas commanded.

“He’ll keep taking it, whether he comes with us or not,” Willem’s gruff voice retorted.

“We can at least keep an eye on him in Cape Town.”

Midas was silent for a moment. “We’ll be working! If anything, we’ll have even less contact with him!” Willem seemed to reject this argument with a snort.

“There are people in Cape Town who can help him,” Midas heaved. His metal bed frame creaked as he lay down and rolled over to stare at the wall.

“I think you’re making a mistake, Willem,” he muttered eventually. Willem let out a disgruntled sniff as he stood up and placed something into the trunk lying at the foot of his bed.

“You don’t get it...” he grunted, “Simon is like a younger brother to me.” Midas suddenly jerked over and glared at Willem, his dark shaggy hair hung over his eyes...



The retro neon lights of the bar in Jongensfontein gave the whole place a movie feel to it. Midas wrapped his arm around Dougie’s shoulder as they strolled back to the Cortina. Dougie had always been Midas’ treasure, and at that moment he looked every bit the picture. He was clothed in an oversized women’s trench coat.

Midas smiled as he recollected how Dougie – only ten at the time – had claimed it the moment it arrived at the orphanage in a black dustbin sack from the pastor’s wife. Midas ruffled his hair. Dougie giggled, but it slowly faded, and a frown found its way onto his lips.

“Why were Willem and Simon fighting?” Dougie asked eventually. Midas merely sighed.

“It’s nothing that should bother you.” He smiled apathetically and squeezed Dougie’s arm to show him that it was alright. He wanted to protect Dougie from the harshness of their reality. Dougie leaned his head against the soft leather of the passenger seat headrest. He cast his gaze out the dew glazed window. The road at night was enigmatic. Every now and then the lights of a solitary house would flicker like a fallen star nestled in the treetops. Dougie let himself drift into dreamland despite Midas blasting some exotic pop song from the Cortina’s cassette player.

Midas leaned back and pulled a rugged horse blanket off the back seats. Cautiously, so as not to wake him, he lay it over Dougie. Then... a blinding glare in the windscreen. Glass exploded into thousands of razor crystals...

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<sup>24</sup> I don’t give a damn!

# The Poem of 99: Sunset Road

Amy Jane Lubbers



The wind carried Midas' sobs to Edin's ears as he hunched over his breakfast of baked beans in a mint coloured metal cup. Neither Willem nor Simon had heard him yet. Something was wrong... Then suddenly it hit him. Dougie was nowhere to be seen... and Midas was crying. To Edin, logically, it only meant one thing. Edin let the battered cup clatter onto the black rocks at his feet.

Something had happened to Dougie. The world shattered around him, melting into a new abyss behind him. He didn't care anymore. He didn't care if the acacias ripped his skin or if jagged rocks stood up to whack his legs. The writhing shrubbery caught Edin's feet, and he collided with the ashy sand of the pathway. The dank forest air crept into his lungs, wafting up and strangling the hazy thoughts in his mind. He found himself assuming a foetal position, his face pressed into the cold ground to soothe the burns of feral thoughts. He clawed at the sand beneath his hand – slowly, intently, caressing its impermanent form.

"Edin!" a dogged yell resounded. It was so out of place in the forest that it seemed to silence the whispering trees. The lonely hum of a dove was all that dared to challenge the voice. Edin scrambled to his feet and stumbled aimlessly onwards. A firm, rough hand grabbed at him. Its fingers dug into his shoulder and thrust him towards their owner.

"Edin," Willem growled in his ear. Edin hung his head and violently shrugged him off.

"What happened, Edin?" he asked. His face contorted, and there was something wild in his eyes. Edin bit his chapped lips and cast his 'gaze' straight at what he assumed was Willem's unknown face.

"Tell me, Edin." Edin knew he couldn't hide it. Willem would find out one way or another.

Willem let go of Edin's collar and stormed back to the camp where Midas stood with his head hung.

"You bastard!" Willem spat. Willem grabbed him by the collar. His fist connected with Midas' face. Midas just stared at him – the sparkle had long left his eyes. They were as dead as a starless night. Midas took every one of Willem's blows. Simon intervened and wrestled Willem off him. He wasn't fighting – he didn't want to. Not anymore. He was a shell, bitterly cold and empty.

"I didn't mean for it to happen!" Midas shot back.

Willem had no words left – only wrathful snarls and hoarse inhumane howls.

He glared at the wrecked Cortina.

"Where is he?!" Willem snapped. Its pastel teal paint abraded. Headlights smashed. He spun and faced him. The memory of the accident raged like hellfire in Midas' mind.

"He's dead..." His fingers traced the cuts on his face.

"You killed him!" Willem raised his fist again... the impact...



Midas' head hit the steering wheel. The contorted arms of trees pierced the windscreen as the Cortina was thrown off the road. Time and space warped – everything moved in slow motion. Dougie was thrust through the windscreen. Deep scarlet blood oozed from his forehead. Midas staggered out of the car, barely able to stand. Glass. Dougie. Car. Help. Blood. Trees. Dougie. Midas' mind was everywhere and nowhere at once. He barely recognised his screams. His ears pulsated. He pulled Dougie from the wreckage. He cradled the boy's limp, blood-soaked body. "Dougie!!" he wept, hugging him. He backed away from the body.

He stared at his shaking hands, drenched in blood. Was it his own or Dougie's? He didn't know. He didn't care. He was in no state to drive, yet intoxicated by shock, and before he realised what he was doing, he reversed the ruined Cortina from the wreckage. He knew he couldn't leave Dougie to die in the forest – and he didn't want to – but he had to get away from the carnage...



Willem's teeth were clenched. "You left him there!" He circled Midas like a predator corralling its prey.

"Do you think I wanted to leave him there?!"

"You still did it!"



# The Poem of 99: Sunset Road

Amy Jane Lubbers

“Your kind is so typical,” he hissed in Midas’ ear. “Always at fault but never taking the blame!”

“None of this would have happened if we had stayed! But no! You insisted! You convinced us all that it would mean a better life for us. Lies! You just wanted to run away from your mistakes!”

Suddenly Willem transformed from a snarling beast into a startled deer. He bit his lip. “Oh really,” he said defensively, “At least I didn’t kill Dougie!”

Midas grabbed his shirt. “No, you just impregnated Bianca and then thought I wouldn’t find out!”

“It’s hardly my fault that she preferred me to the bastard child of a Chinaman,” he remarked cruelly. Edin knew this day would come. It was a day that had long been brewing, like an afternoon thunderstorm, gathering its intensity.

“You just can’t keep your hands to yourself!” Midas growled. “You think you have the god-given right to exploit what you want without a second thought!” he yelled.

“Well, I didn’t see you stay to support your fiancée.”

“Why would I support a woman who betrayed me? Why would I support your bastard child? You destroyed everything –”

He stopped mid-sentence for Edin, who had been standing silently next to Midas the whole time, turned and walked away from their duel. They both watched as he placed a considerable distance between them and sat down, cross-legged on the grass ‘looking’ out over the ocean.

“Why don’t you go after him? Maybe you can kill him too, then I only have you to get rid of.” Willem’s comment made Midas double back... but he stopped, his fist only a breath away from Willem’s pale face. He let go of him. Willem slicked back his jet-black hair and regained his composure.

“Simon and I are carrying on to Cape Town,” he said as if nothing had happened.

“Maybe that’s for the best,” Midas snarled.

“I doubt Edin will come.”

“Why would he? He’s never been anything in your eyes,” Midas said. “What did you call him the other day? A parasite...”

Willem cast his gaze away from Midas. He hated it when Midas called him out for things he considered trivial.

Without another word, Willem and his ‘lapdog’, Simon, trudged towards the forest path that lead back to the road. Simon cast one last longing gaze back at the teal Cortina – even its damaged state, it was a treasure...

Silence...

Midas had long forgotten what it sounded like. Waves crashing on the rocks. Milkwood leaves rustling in the breeze. Midas sat down beside Edin on the grass and stared at the tumbling sea. But it wasn’t long before the memory of Dougie choked him. Edin placed his arm around Midas, rubbing the back of his neck, reassuring him. Midas no longer felt like the protector of the group. He was crushed by the weight of reality.

“I’m sorry, Edin,” he wept. “I didn’t mean for everything to fall apart.”

“Things fell apart long ago,” Edin said eventually. The thunderstorm has passed. Its rains had washed clean the lies that stood between the brothers. Midas looked up at him. For as long as Midas had known him, the boy had looked as if he was constantly burdened by sorrow.

“What do you mean?”

“You tried to protect me and Dougie from pain...from the fights. But most of the time you forgot about me...” Edin closed his eyes. “You thought that because I couldn’t see what was going on, I was naïve.”

“You mean, you knew all the things I tried to protect you from?”

Edin nodded.

“I knew even before you did, that Bianca was having an affair with Willem. I also knew before all of you that Simon was doing tik. Because I listened...The world thought me invisible, but it only meant people would say things around me that they wouldn’t say to others. Sometimes I think you were the blindest of us all. Always hoping things weren’t as bad as they seemed.” Midas hung his head.

“Give me your hand,” Edin said. Midas placed his open palm in Edin’s hand. He placed something small and cold into it. It took a moment for Midas register what it was.

# The Poem of 99: Sunset Road

Amy Jane Lubbers

“Mrs du Randt’s brooch?” he said suddenly, barely believing what he was holding. The small, blanched porcelain butterfly with dainty gold trimmings and gold pin had been their matron’s ‘guardian angel’.

“Dougie gave it to me. He told me that we needed a guardian angel more than Mrs du Randt.”

“Dougie spent hours helping her find it, knowing full well that he took it...” Midas said slowly.

“Can you blame him?”

He smiled. “Of course not...Dougie...Dougie was our angel...” At the mention of Dougie, Midas’ smile faded.

“You know Dougie doesn’t blame you,” Edin said.

“It’s my fault he’s gone...” Midas fixed his gaze at the pale cerulean sky.

“Dougie wouldn’t want you to blame yourself. He would say it had to happen.”

Midas rubbed the brooch. “Dougie was like that wasn’t he...”

The wind quietened from a cry to a whisper in their ears. The waves were the same colour as the Cortina – pristine and teal. Dougie’s laughter danced in the clouds, and he seemed to call their names. *Midaaaas! Edin!* Edin passed his hand over his pocket where a crumpled piece of paper was stowed. On it was the beginning of the poem he’d thought up. It was written in Dougie’s spidery handwriting. He knew now why he’d struggled with it. He had to stop trying to add colour; for even those who could see, would see no colour in his story. All the words in his monochrome mind fell into place. Edin began to believe that maybe Dougie was indeed an angel – one sent to free them from themselves. Like the waves below him, the poem began to roll off his tongue, and it found its place in the heavens with Dougie’s spirit.

To drive until we reach the sunset.

You believe brighter days wait there.

Dancing above rolling waves  
with fragile wings.

There for a moment  
and lost in a second.

That which bound us  
Quickly broke us.  
On Sunset road  
where wings we fail to see  
Will surely guide us.



## Nana Esi Donkor

*Nana Esi Donkor is a student, violinist, and writer from Accra, Ghana. She was a senior reporter for The Exonian, an award-winning student-run newspaper, and she currently writes poetry, children's literature, and short fiction.*



# Sobolo

Nana Esi Donkor

As I sit down on the bench next to my classmate Abena, she makes a comment that I can hardly hear over the shouts of squash players warming up, and highlife music blaring from school speakers. “I said I can’t believe there are no girls playing for Blue. It’s first game too,” she repeats.

“No, these things are announced to us pretty last-minute, so it makes sense my girls wouldn’t want to,” I reply. I am part of Blue, one of the four sports teams into which my school has divided the entire student body. Here, at the first monthly ‘inter-color’ competition, it smells like sweat and sobolo, the dark mineral blend everyone now drinks. Lifting my plastic cup, I take a sip of the sour mixture and suppress an involuntary grimace.

“You like this version?” Abena asks, studying my face. “It’s red hibiscus.”

“Of course,” I lie.

“Kuukua said she went on a sobolo-and-leaves cleanse and lost two pounds.”

“Yeah? She looks great,” I answer, surveying the room to avoid eye contact.

I spot an unfamiliar girl wearing a bold skirt at the front of the viewing room. Gold, cerulean, orange, and emerald, the colors of kente cloth sweep past her feet as she sits down. She is awkwardly positioned on the bench, half on her side and half facing forward, as if she does not know whether to turn to the group of people next to her. Her short afro is pulled back by a white band that matches the ring on her thumb, moving back and forth as it rubs against her left hand.

Then, I see her face. A poorly constructed mask, her face is a familiar expression of longing and anxiety. Anger bubbles up inside me as I study her taut smile and worried eyes; I hate her face. Time confronts me with an image of my past, and it is me on that bench. One year younger, I am an amateur actress whose lines are always wrong or delivered incorrectly. In bulky grey sandals I had bought simply because every female student owned a pair, I had tried unsuccessfully to mask my discomfort. Despite spending a full semester at this school, I had yet to find my own set of people, or at least a group within which I could feign comfort. Seated on the edge of my chair, waiting for something that would not happen, I was painfully aware of how incongruous I looked. In my head, I had carefully recounted every interaction, assessed every piece of clothing, analyzed every unspoken rule that I had so deliberately followed.



The girl’s voice interrupts my thoughts. “Hey! Hey John! How are you? Are you playing for Red?”

John, a dark-skinned senior, is only half paying attention as he scans the viewing room. With the music off for the squash players to huddle with their coaches, I can make out his curt answer: “Yeah.”

She laughs a short, breathy laugh. “Right, of course, I hope you have enough energy after having to walk all the way down here to the sports complex. I know I wouldn’t with this heat, right?”

Her voice is too high, like a bird chirping for a mate. I want to tell her to lie better and that she does not have to pretend, all at once. I want to say she is enough, everything I wish someone had said to me as I had sat there, unable to stand the constricting pain in my chest. *It’s not my place to interfere*, I remind myself— and yet it is exactly my place. I imagine running up and hugging her, declaring even if no one else does, I love her. *I don’t even know her*, another part of me protests as I choke down frustration.

John offers her a civil smile but swiftly walks away, her goodbye rendered inaudible by over-enthusiastic spectators applauding the first serve. She smiles emptily to herself, at no one and at nothing, and at last, I get up. I am aware that I have little to offer, but unable to watch her fade, as I have, into the one acceptable hue of our monotone society. I muster the courage to step in her direction; *I have to—*

“Hey! Where are you going? The game just started,” Abena calls. The present returns with all its logic, and indeed, it is no longer me sitting on that bench. So I turn away from the girl in the kente skirt and pick up my sobolo.



## Jenna Rigby

*Jenna Rigby is 15 years old. She is an avid reader and writer and hopes to pursue a career in literature. She says, "For me, writing is a way to express myself. I enjoy writing fiction and poetry. My other hobbies, which include drawing and photography, also give me the freedom to be creative. In my free time, if I haven't got my head in a book, I love spending quality time with friends and family, and visiting new places. In addition to my love of reading, I like numbers and would also like to study finance."*



# Again

Jenna Rigby

I remember a park my sister and I used to play in when we were younger. It was only a few blocks away from school, and we'd often stop there on our way home. The grass was always an unnaturally vivid green, even when it had not rained in months. The swing set, as stubborn and defiant as it was, had become worn over the years, but there was always one swing on the far right of the park that still worked. Its rubber seat had yet to be broken, and its chains had not been tainted with the orange colour of rust just yet. The swing had always been mine. Whenever we stopped at the park, I would always run to reach it before my sister. I remember I tripped once and scratched my leg open, and she had reached the swing before me. Everyone thought I was crying because I was injured.

I'm the youngest in my family, even if only by a year. I thought this gave me some sort of power, some way to get everything I wanted. I was selfish. I am selfish. As I sat on the swing, laughing with my mother and father as I soared into the sky, I barely noticed my sister had lost her smile. I barely cared, and that selfish part of me looked away as a tear rolled down her face. If I could take back anything I ever did, it would be that. I would give her the opportunity to be able to do something, be someone.

"Thaliya!"

I jolt upright in my seat. I'm sitting in Geography class. Everyone looks at me expectantly, partially hidden pity hovering in their eyes. I look up to see my Geography teacher, with that same look plastered on her face. I don't miss the hint of annoyance that springs across her face either. She sighs.

"Liya, next time, please pay attention in my class," she says. I nod quickly, feeling a sudden, sharp pang of guilt. If it was anyone else, they wouldn't have gotten off so lightly. The bell rings, the ear-piercing sound making my head spin. I fling my bag over my shoulder and scurry out of class.

My mother was always very overprotective. To a point of frustration. She wouldn't let me go anywhere alone. She always fussed over everything, especially my hair, which was always messily falling in my face. She absolutely refused to let me walk home from school, regardless of us living a mere five minutes away. However, recently she would make me wait hours after school, only for her to phone and say she wouldn't be able to pick me up. Today is one of those days. After sitting on one of the wooden benches outside of the school building for over an hour, I realise my mother probably forgot to pick me up. I stand up, ready to leave, and as I do, everyone turns to watch me, making me feel self-conscious. I know what they're thinking, what thoughts are bouncing through their heads. Will she ever get better? She doesn't have friends anymore. Her grades have dropped. She no doubt lost her sport scholarship. I know that's what they're all thinking. That's what I'm thinking too.

My shoes crunch against gravel as I make my way home. The sun is scorching hot and I can feel sweat rolling down my olive-toned skin. My curly, shoulder-length brown hair is tied up in a high ponytail, but a few strands have already come loose and now obscure my vision. I wouldn't mind walking home, if it wasn't for the park I'd have to pass on my way there.

The previously animated park is now lifeless, the grass no longer green, and the trees no longer full of the multicoloured birds that would chirp happily. I walk up to my swing and sit down on the hot rubber. I swing up into the sky, and my stomach doesn't even turn because of my distance from the ground. I feel nothing. I don't want to go home and face my mother. She gets paler by the day, and her dark rings are almost the same colour as her pitch-black hair. I decide to remain on the swing. My mother won't even realise I'm not home. She doesn't even pay much attention when I am home, not anymore.

I look up from my spot on the swing and see someone in the distance. A girl with wavy brown hair that, despite the colour, looks just like my mother's. She reminds me of my sister. She's tall with lengthy chestnut coloured hair, just like her. As she walks closer, I see her face too is covered in freckles. I would've brushed it off as coincidence if it wasn't for her piercing, emerald coloured eyes.

I stand up and get ready to begin my journey home when I notice the figure is walking towards me. I pick up my pace ignoring the shadow creeping behind me. I can feel my heart rate increasing. It can't be.

"Thaliya!" the figure calls.

I'm breathing harder. It feels as if everything around me is caving in.

"Liya... it's me, Addie."

I turn around slowly and look into her green eyes, identical to mine. Addie. My sister. Except for the broken look in her eyes, it looks just like her. But that's not possible. Because Addie died a year ago. The last thing I see is a tear roll down her cheek and the ghost of a smile playing on her face before I hit the ground and the world goes black.



# Again

Jenna Rigby

When I wake up, I'm sure I'm lying in a hospital bed, but I don't seem to recall why. I can smell disinfectants and blood. The room I'm in is almost completely empty except for my mother sitting on the edge of my bed. The worried look on her face disappears, replaced by an eerie look of happiness.

"Don't worry. You just had a panic attack. You're going to be okay," my mother says and moves over to give me a hug.

"I saw her. I saw Addie," I cry. A worried look passes over my mother's face, but it disappears almost as quickly as it came, her face returning to its usual look of emptiness.

"Hallucinations are common when having gone through trauma," she says matter-of-factly, but it seems as if she's trying to convince herself more than me.

I get checked out of the hospital later that day. All I think about is the girl who I saw. She looked older and skinnier, but it was undeniably Addie. Every time I bring it up with my mother, she brushes it off and changes the topic. The most common topic change is to my father.

My father works in London and has come to visit us in Cape Town about four times since he left. We aren't very close, and he tries to make up for it by buying me whatever I want when he comes to visit. He left shortly after Addie's death. He says he was going to leave before that, but I know that's not true. I overheard him telling my mom that he can't keep lying to me.

The next few days pass as normal, but I'm still haunted by the sight of my sister after last seeing her days ago. Even as a hallucination, she looked wrong, sick. She lost so much weight, and her face lost all its colour. She looked at me without really seeing me. I shiver. I hate thinking about it, but what if she was really there? It was her voice, even if it sounded damaged and hoarse. It was her, even if she didn't look the same. But that didn't mean it was real, I remind myself. Your mind can play tricks on you sometimes.

While sitting on a bench outside school, I hear footsteps and look up to see a girl approaching me. She has messy blond hair, and her tie looks too tight around her throat. She must have noticed me staring and began to feel uncomfortable because she lifts her hands up to loosen it. She grins at me.

"Hello, Thaliya," she says, the beautiful fake smile still plastered on her face.

"Amelia," I reply. She swallows hard and I look at her with my eyebrows raised. I know there is nothing friendly in my expression.

"I miss her too. I know she was your sister, but she was my best friend." I can see the sorrow in Amelia's hazel eyes directed at me. As if she didn't lose a best friend herself.

"Well, you seem to be doing perfectly fine without her." I make sure to glance at her group of friends standing behind her, laughing as if nothing is wrong. I can see in her entire face that she is insulted, but I don't care. She is going on like everything is normal when it's not. When it won't ever be the same again.

"I know we all handle grief differently, but losing someone doesn't mean cutting out everyone else you love," she sighs. "Listen, Liya, I didn't come to argue with you. I..." she lowers her voice, her tone completely solemn, and leans in. "I think... I think I saw her... I was walking to school and she waved at me." I look up and see her eyes shining. "I know she committed suicide, but... did you ever find her body?"

"Amelia, the police have been investigating this for months—"

"I know, I know. I'm losing my mind. I thought I was getting better. I thought I was doing fine without her." She takes a deep, unsteady breath. "I'll see you around, okay."

I watch her walk away. She's right. When I lost Addie, I lost everything along with her. I thought I lost my mind too, but Amelia says she saw her as well. Now that I think about it, the police never did find her body. No, what am I saying? What I saw a few days ago was nothing. I just saw someone who looked like Addie and started panicking.

Amelia is just messing with me. She thinks this is a joke, I'm a joke. She wants to make me feel even more insane than I probably already am. I clench my teeth, throw my bag on my back and walk away humiliated.

I arrive at my house and find the front door open, with hushed voices floating through it. I step inside cautiously but drop my bag on the floor as soon as I see my dad and rush over to embrace him in a hug. He is much taller than I am, even though I'm already sixteen.

# Again

Jenna Rigby

“Tomorrow, I’m taking you to the carnival,” is all he says.

The following day, after about a half an hour drive, we arrive at the carnival. It is crowded, and my ears fill with the sounds of people talking and children shouting excitedly. I inhale the scent of pizza and candyfloss, as I gape in awe at all the different food stalls and rides. But what catches my eye is the Ferris wheel, as high as a skyscraper, towering over us. For a second, I forget about my sister and impatiently pull my father toward the queue.

Once we paid for our tickets, we make our way to one of the metallic, red-coloured seats and slip in. There was still a fair amount of space, as the seat was made for three. Patiently, we wait for everyone else to board the ride. After a few minutes, we hear someone announce that the ride is about to begin. I hold in my breath, awaiting our ascent.

I look at everyone else still waiting for their opportunity to go on the ride. There is a little girl with ocean blue eyes who waves at me. I smile and wave back. My eyes move further down the line, watching all the children talk to their friends and family excitedly.

Suddenly, I feel the hairs on the back of my neck raise. I can see someone observing me out of the corner of my eye. I let out a shaking breath as I turn ninety degrees to face her. No! It can’t be. My hands start shaking and it feels like all the air is sucked out of my lungs. My seat starts making squeaking sounds and begins moving, even as I’m unlatching the rail that keeps me inside. I’m less than a meter from the ground, but I still feel the impact of the jump as I land on the patchy grass.

Behind me my father is screaming “Stop”, but I have no idea if it is directed at me or the person controlling the Ferris Wheel, so I continue running. My heels dig into the dirt as I make my way over to the queue and stand directly in front of my so-called hallucination. Behind me, the ride has stopped moving and my father is darting towards me, almost falling over his feet a few times. I turn to face him, tears threatening to spill from my eyes.

“Explain this!” I demand, my voice laced with rage. “Explain how my dead sister is standing in front of me, very much alive!”

The crowd begins to stir, clearly uncomfortable with my sudden outburst. The commotion must have drawn my mother’s attention, because she marches over to us, looking as confused as ever. Until she sees Addie. She opens her mouth, ready to speak, but then closes it again and looks at me sadly, as if I’m the only person in the entire world who has no idea what is going on.

“You lied to me! You said I was hallucinating; you made me believe I was losing my mind, just as I had supposedly lost my sister. But clearly not, because here she is!” I point to Addie, who looks on the verge of tears herself.

She says, “I think I can explain.”

I feel like a ghost as I walk through the crowds of people at the carnival with my older sister Addie next to me. She doesn’t talk; not as we walk past candy stalls, or carnival games, or the array of luscious foods that make my stomach grumble. We finally stop at an old bench away from everyone else, including our parents who were too astounded to speak or stop us from leaving.

Addie sits down on the bench, but gazes out into the distance, where to, I don’t know. After a few silent moments pass, she turns to face me. The empty look in her eyes almost dissolves as she throws herself onto me and starts weeping.

“I missed you. Every day that I was in that... place,” she manages to say. She pulls away from me. “What you saw that day was real. I did write that note, but I wasn’t going to use it then. Mom... she saw it shoved in one of my notebooks and had me sent to this mental hospital.” Her voice cracks on the last few words, and I don’t know how to comfort her.

“It was terrible there. I knew nobody, and I had to stay in a small room with no privacy. I couldn’t take it anymore. The mental hospital was making me crazy. I knew I had to get out. We – we started a fire, and they escorted us all out of the gates. I managed to slip away with a friend from the hospital. We were staying with her cousin.” She looks at me, but her eyes never completely meet mine. All those times I tried to be better than her, refusing to let her get any attention, weigh heavy on my shoulders.

“Adalyn, I’m so sorry you had to go through that. I had no idea. Every day I wished that you’d come back, that everything had just been a dream. I know I am a terrible sister. I missed you so much.” I pull her into a tight embrace. I will never forgive myself for how horrible of a sister I was.

# Again

Jenna Rigby

Addie and I spend the rest of the day together at the carnival, catching up on the year we missed of each other's lives. We spoke about anything and everything until the sun peeked out over the horizon. We had gone on all the rides except the Ferris wheel, which we quietly slipped onto, before going home. Sitting in the seat as it ascended was the most beautiful thing. Not because the setting sun caused the sky to look like candyfloss of all different colours, but because I was with my sister again.

By the time we left the carnival, the sun had completely set. The stars shone overhead, and along with the moon, they provided most of the light as we walked down the street. I was not on speaking terms with my parents, but they didn't really speak anyway. During our time spent together, Addie and I giggled uncontrollably like the good old days. She seems happy. Mom and dad seemed to have decided not to send her back. Even if they tried, I wouldn't have let them.

I'd always thought my parents were different because of Addie's death, but now I know it must've been the guilt. The guilt of sending her to a mental hospital. The guilt of not telling me. The guilt of faking her death.

"Were you ever going to tell me?" I ask as we walk, "I mean, Addie wasn't going to stay in that hospital forever. What were you going to tell everyone when she was released? That she rose from the dead?" I try to calm myself. It is my mother who replies.

"She... we were going to have her live with your father in London. We thought it was best if you two didn't live together, if you didn't know your sister was alive. She was going to get released in a few months," she chokes out.

A fog begins to settle over the streets, and combined with the darkness, creates an unnerving gloom. I can hear cars honking in the distance, and a light drizzle begins to fall from the sky.

"Why? How could you possibly do that? How would you be able to live with yourself after doing that?" I ask, shaking with anger. Surprisingly, my sister looks up, the corners of her mouth turned up to form a tiny smile.

"It doesn't matter. I'm here now and I can stay here, with you. Let's just forget about it," she says. Of course she says that. She has always been too understanding.

"No, this is unforgivable! How dare—" I begin.

"Don't speak to your mother like that! You have no idea how hard it was for us! We made this decision to benefit the both of you. Now, let's get to the car before we all get soaked. We can continue this discussion at home," My father yells. With a sigh, Addie walks ahead of us, not even bothering to argue. I, however, do not mind doing it for her.

"Benefit us? Well, did it benefit Addie?" I ask. We continue pointlessly yelling at each other as we walk toward the car. Most of the parking was taken when we'd arrived, so we parked about a block away. Over all of the arguing we didn't hear as a car flew down the road. Just as Addie was crossing it.

"No! Addie!" I screech, the sound echoing in my ears.

I saw it before it happened. But not in time to warn her. All I could get out was a high-pitched shriek, as I watched the car hit her.

I sink to my knees, not caring that they'd get sodden from the rain gathering on the pavement. The rain runs down my face, racing my very own tears. I begin to shiver, but eventually, I can't even feel the cold anymore.

I didn't need to run to her to know how bad it was. The car was driving well past the speed limit, and the horrifying moment of impact flashed before my eyes. I didn't need to wait for the ambulance to arrive to know if she would be okay. I could see it just by looking at her lifeless body, lying in the middle of the road. I didn't need to wait for her to be examined by the doctors to know her fate. I already knew she was gone. I already knew I'd lost my sister... again.







## Thabo Clive Mathonsi

*Thabo Clive Mathonsi was born in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, on 25 August 1994. He received his bachelors degree in development studies from Lupane State University in Bulawayo. He has been with the NGO Smile for Africa, Manicaland, since 2017 and is currently a programs and fields facilitator and officer. His main areas of interest and love are novel, script, motivational and poetry writing. Thabo is also the lead member of a group of poets and writers in Bulawayo known as Poetic Justice.*



# Blessings

Thabo Clive Mathonsi

## Chapter 1

“Blessings”, the curse to the negligent and thorns of pain to the weary – but this was God’s will. A true blessing in disguise, unmistakable yet very much troubling to a social and economic leper as such is the standard of misguided prestige. Eat or be eaten, survive or be decimated. Victim preys on victim, the strong have decaying morals, and the poor are beyond help with wishful thinking but for one woman, one Queen. “The Mother of all Theresas” had it all figured out. She understood that you are only sick and labelled an outcast by the same shadows that seek amplification and approval from the dysfunctional forces of the world.

Being poor was another thing, but caring for something beyond help was fruitless, and a waste of resources for which people would scorn her. Prostitution is one of the oldest professions undoubtedly, but it became worryingly famous and normal, even above death itself. Young girls, weak parents, “devil in the dollars”, cried a blind old fool once upon a time, but the world only listens to those it deems fit to see and acknowledge.

She was the only person who understood how to endure pain to the core. Born and bred in a family of ten siblings and countless other bastard children, she had to learn to survive quickly because clearly Africa had already victimized her childhood necessities at a tender age as the firstborn. Her father was the commander of the local drunkards’ militia and brothel mafia. The mother was a formidable shebeen queen herself, the front runners if ever there was a beer and infidelity contest! Who could blame them? Poverty alone is the worst addiction ever! For those born telling it, the struggle every day is to sober up by enhancing your life through prayer and hard work, but for those that love shortcuts and ecstasy, the serenades in a bottle of beer seem to be equally satisfying! It was clearly up to her to wear the family pants.

Tough as it was, she tried her best even though it meant her losing a bit of herself in the process. On 23 February, she had just turned eighteen and her father was drunk and her mom out as usual. The most painful thing wasn’t what happened that day, but the reaction she got from her mother as she sought her love, consolation and guidance! The head of the house. Her own father, her guide had violated her in the worst possible way, and no one cared! Her siblings were too young to understand, and daddy to them was a hero with all the cheap and sun-burnt candy he used to get them.

“How could he?” she pondered on a pile of blood-stained sheets and shredded undergarments, but the deed was done, and again the devil had robbed her of something sacred and important. “God doesn’t care!” she would scream and shout in the cold showers she took. It was all vain, she conceded. She didn’t go to school at all, but she was clever enough to love listening to the radio.

The new start center! “HIV/AIDS!” “STIs” and “STDs” she used to hear, but she never fully understood it, although she knew she had to get to one of those “hospital places”, as she used to call it.

Positive! She tested positive! Five times the test was done to curb any disbelief, but the outcome was vigorously unsympathetic. It was a very sad and soul-killing day for her. Her own father was the result of this unprecedented eventuality. In anger, she vowed to kill him and her mother, but her conscience couldn’t let her. At one point she picked a strong rope around the haystacks of a nearby house in a feat to hang herself, but again she just couldn’t see it through. What was wrong with her? Why her? Why, God? She would cry sorrowfully alone on the concrete floor in her room that she shared with five of her younger sisters. Pregnant! A baby boy! No! She bellowed. It was incest at its worst form, but she had a choice to make. Abort the baby or keep it as a blessing from God as all children are! The answer in her affliction was simple; she was going to abort the baby!

And so to the toilet or bush it was, as is the custom of the “life dumpers”. It was a matter of when, where, and how she thought, but no one must know or see her for this could mean jail time if she was caught. So, she chose the Sabbath day out of all the days to commit this horrendous act! The idea was to wait after everyone was gone, and then consume the abortion pills, and the rest would take its natural course she thought! But God is not mocked! That day her aunt from the neighboring urban town came to visit and therefore no one went to church for they were waiting for her.



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## Chapter 2

That day was all good vibes, and the traditional family bonding laughs here and there to signify appreciation to a splendid meal and important company. In the hardcore black community, I mean raw to the core black, the belief is that you can get away with anything, and the victims will cry foul and default in spirit, but with pregnancy, no one can hide the unbidden! The aunt could see it in the change in her complexion, and she immediately asked to have a word with her to “catch up on things”.

“What happened? Whose is it? When was it? Have you told your parents? What are we going to do with it?” These questions were like a wrecking ball that came mercilessly running back and forth to crush her little wall of confidence, modesty and life she had. She stammered! Not sure how to answer back her aunty; tears began to flood all over her face and eyes.

“He... Dad... Mom doesn’t... The family doesn’t...” she began sobbing heavily, and her aunt comforted her and told her babies are God’s burden and His most beloved, so she should be of good cheer for this was the beginning of great things to come. Little did the aunt know of what had been done, taken and broken away from her niece.

So the night ended, with spirits mended and pain tended for a time. That night she slept in the crowded kitchen-turned-guestroom with her aunty, and they chatted all night long. Finally, someone who cared and loved her and saw her for more than a deprived and weak girl she thought. It seemed fitting that she tells someone about the horrors she had faced the past couple of weeks and so she did without holding back any details. You would think that in such a day and age, people are less cultural and morally stiff like in old times, but humanity is still a farfetched occurrence. Again she was labelled a liar and a stupid girl and told by her aunt, the one she trusted most, to go do the dirty dishes that mirrored her actions.

“Life is truly unfair!” she thought. Evil had torn and thrashed the zealous to be touched, but no good was going to save anyone this time like in the movies. It was just too much, so she went to bed that night in her usual room with her little sisters and kissed all of them goodbye and told them to always stick together and that she loves them more than anything in the world. Weeping and in all forms of pain, she cried deeply in a heart-to-heart moment with her young sisters, but she knew that midnight was almost upon her and that was her getaway time. Two small taxi-bags and a satchel that had seen better days were all she needed to carry all her belongings, and so she sneaked out whilst everyone was asleep and began her journey to a world without a name.

## Chapter 3

To the city of “Mecca”, land of giants and spaghetti roads. She smiled as she strode along the dusty and stony road of her village post office. But only the dark of the night alluded to her opinions, and the community dogs barked her grief to existence every time she passed a neighbor’s house. She was truly alone, afraid and in a dark place but her will was strong and set.

Mecca was going to be her new chance to live, a fresh breath and a lifetime distraction from her dysfunctional family. It was a land made for the dreamers, a place of opportunity, the arena of peace for those truly sun-kissed by pain and tranquility. Jobs were aplenty, the people were ridiculously friendly, and love was real. She could almost taste it and feel it in the air, she thought as she strode along. However, mornings and dawn are built on the unexpected and unthinkable.

Sometimes wishes do come true, and sometimes it’s unexplainable how the brain constructs such deep and awful illusions as she found out. Morning set in! And the Mecca she had read about in books was nowhere to be found. The dust road seemed to be even worse along this side of the area; there were dense marshes with countless thorny shrubs and a lot of goats and sheep. Being born and living all your life in the rural area surely has its demerits as she found out. In this area was a small, neighboring rural town close to where she used to live. However, she had never gone beyond her village’s borders, so this was uncharted territory for her. Hunger and thirst were upon her, therefore, she went to a nearby borehole and drank some water and washed her face a bit to refresh herself, for it was morning.

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“Phew!” she sighed as she took in the surroundings around her and sat down beneath an oak tree. The area seemed a bit remote compared to her village, it felt like a horror scene where only the main actor survives, and the rest are victims during the length of the movie. All of a sudden, she heard a faint corresponding movement – it had the sound of a woodpecker digging into a tree trunk. It was all too common not to notice and feel, as was the sound of her empty belly!

She could try to sneak into a nearby farm and steal some sugar cane and watermelon to curb her hunger, she thought. So the plan was put to motion. The first step was obviously to carry her belongings and place them at a hidden place in case she had to run away depending on the success of the plan. The second step was to check if the farm wire was electrical or razor wire in which case she could use a blanket to place over it and cross over unhurt. Lastly, dogs and guards were the tricky part, but out of all the things her parents had done to her, they had made an exceptional athletic girl child. Boy, could she run! There was this one time when she was sixteen years old where she outran two local and prestigious male sprinters in her area for the prize of a heifer during the village chief’s inauguration.

Realistically, she could breeze past any threat as long as she had a steady distance to get into her stride. So she went nicodemously in search of a target farm, and as fate would have it, she found one after just walking for a kilometer. The sign at the entrance point showed that the farm was called Herod’s Farm, and by the looks of it, it belonged to a wealthy owner. Everything was evergreen, the livestock full of fat and the infrastructures where all built with a taste of unique modernity. It was the farm of dreams for any man who dared to dream agriculturally.

Quickly! Before she was seen, she executed her plan with significant focus and speed. “One, two”, she sang in her aurora of thieving brilliance, it was just too easy, like she was born for this art, but something was awfully wrong! Unbeknown to her, prior to her entrance to the farm, some herdsmen had seen her by the community borehole from afar drinking water and had chosen to follow this “stranger” as it was custom to familiarize with newcomers and strangers to the community. So as she was in her element of cutting the sugar cane, she suddenly felt quick and loud steps coming towards her, but as she tried to run away, something hard and heavy knocked her on the head!

## Chapter 5

In her dream, she was queen and had everything she had ever wanted. Gold, vines, land, milk, honey and joyful servants – she surely was the best as her kingdom sang melodies of her graciousness and greatness. But this was before the real pain set in, and reality blew the fantasy mist away!

She woke up in pain with a bandage on her head and her belongings next to her. Her first reaction was to try and wake up and instinctively run again, but she had taken such a hard hit that had drained her of all her reserves; therefore, she fainted again. She woke up again to the noise and eyes of a very large crowd. For an area that looked remote, the number of people around at this point was quite shocking. Looking at the people circled around her, she felt like a wounded animal ready to be given its last gasps of air before the slaughter. She was very afraid and overwhelmed with embarrassment. It was a norm that whenever a thief was caught, the community had to see the thief and shame him or her using the legal channels of the gathering crowd’s speech and opinions on the thief’s suitable punishment.

The village head then finally spoke after what seemed like hours of torcher. “Who are you, and why are you here to cause discomfort in our community?!” he asked. Lost for words and a little bit jaded, she mustered the strength to stand up and talk to them for the first time ever since she arrived!

“I am a young lady, eighteen years of age, from a village that is close to this one, and I am an orphan,” she said with so much conviction that even the idiom of crocodile tears would have had emotional and watery eyes. The crowd was moved at this revelation, especially the orphans and widows in their midst, who knew the core struggles of being alone in a world that never shows mercy. Finally, the farm owner stood up as the crowd was mumbling and rumbling about what to do with the young “orphan” thief!

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“I am Herod, the owner of this farm that this young lady trespassed and violated against, I beg that the crowd listens and conjures to my suggestion”, he said. “As the victim in this matter, my ruling was going to be very severe if it was a case of a mob venture or if the perpetrator had a family to liaise and commune with. But as we have all heard, she is an orphan; hence I declare that she works at my farm for six months as compensation for the damage she has done.”

These words were met with massive positive support. Thus the council adhered to the farm owner’s wishes, for he was among the most powerful and influential people in the whole community.

So she was to be Herod’s servant for six months, but this wasn’t so bad compared to the devils she left behind, she pondered in her mind. She was actually happy about her fate, for once. At least in this land, no one knew her or could harm her like had been done to her by her family. As the days rolled along, she began to understand and learn new things at the farm. Even the farm owner began to notice how she was fast and intelligent at learning things and that was very appealing in many ways to him. No one saw her as the thief that came with rags and a funny looking bag anymore after some time, she had even made friends, and was happy and free at last. But as the time was nearing its end for her service at the farm, she didn’t want to leave anymore, for the benefits at the farm were visible on the health and well-being of everyone who worked there. So she made a plan which could cost her greatly, or benefit her greatly if she was successful. As her pregnancy progressed, she wondered about the advantage that might be in her grasp.

## Chapter 6

It was customary and a traditional belief that a pregnant woman was to be relieved and exempt of all duties, especially if she was suspected and expected to carry a boy child, a father’s investment and legacy bearer. Usually, a lady would have been relieved of her duties three to four months before childbirth, but she decided she was not willing to reveal the pregnancy yet, especially considering its cause. So she devised another plan.

Herod’s son had just returned home from foreign education and life-enhancing expeditions across the globe, and he was a very likeable person. Obviously, he was a level above and beyond her in terms of class and in the social pecking order of the community, but this town boy had one weakness, his power to bend his father’s will.

In all his life, Herod had one child and two wives, and his child was pampered like a prince. The boy grew, breathed and even dreamt royalty. But like his father, he found it hard to get children, despite being in his early thirties and married for five years. It must have been an unfortunate hereditary issue, but he always cried and begged to God for a son and better days. Things were hard for him and his wife and their love suffered a dip occasionally when he was drunk as he would blame his wife for being barren and evil for their lack of children.

Awkwardly enough, the girl thief and Herod’s son became close as he was a huge fan of humor and sport, and she was an expert in these. She never told anyone about her pregnancy or wore tight and revealing clothes. Being a clever girl, she made baggy clothes a trademark and her own form of style that seemed well suited to her, as other workers would compliment her. She knew that only Herod’s son could talk to his father about extending her stay at the farm, so she had to convince him first. She waited for him near the threshold, as usual, for a chat and a game of checkers. “What happened to your mother, my friend?” she asked as she took two of his pieces easily.

“She died giving birth to me years ago,” he said, as he took two of her pieces with a grin and fake smile. Seeing that this was an emotional subject to him, she pressed even more.

“I was happy once, born in a good family and free, but now I have no one and no family.”

“The days are near for my exit dear friend, but know that I have had the best time of my life over the past few months!” There was dead silence for a bit until the game was finally over and he won for the first time for she threw the game purposefully.

He was gutted at the reality and words of his friend, for indeed she was about to leave, and who knows, maybe she was to be gone forever. Surely, if he had a say to it, he could help and rescue the situation he thought.

So he asked her bluntly with a straight and serious face, “The only way you will be able to stay here is



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if you agree to become my second wife and I convince my father of this development.” This didn’t shock her at all for she knew the politics of culture and realized the benefits that could come with this for her and her unborn child. Therefore, she agreed because she knew him and they were friends, so it would be simple to get along as a couple, she thought.

So Herod’s son went to talk with his father about the new development, and Herod disagreed vehemently. His argument was based on the shame it would bring upon the family if his son took a known outsider who came into their home as a thief, despite being like family now. It was a taboo and an insult to Herod, and he was infuriated by this. For days they argued and debated, basing it on personal and public opinions, and finally Herod’s son stuck to his decision, even when he knew his father didn’t support him.

However, Herod was a shrewd and stern man when it comes to his beliefs and opinions, and he could not have this at all. Thus he disowned his son, sending him away, including the thief, to fend for themselves, since he didn’t oblige to his father’s will.

And so for friendship and love, Herod’s son lost it all, and because of culture and public opinion, Herod lost his son to a stranger’s cause.

At daybreak the following day, she was woken up by Herod’s son with instructions to pack her belongings and prepare to go away for they had failed to reason with Herod. She was shocked by this revelation and saddened by what her situation had done to Herod’s son and his wife. But this was far from over, for in fact, she had a new enemy lurking and breathing up close to her in the form of Melody, Herod’s daughter-in-law. She had lost it all because of a village girl who she thought wanted to destroy her marriage and peace.

## Chapter 7

So to the road they made their way, to a journey far abroad the horizon, to the city of lights, town life as Herod’s son instructed his two wives. He had a house that he had bought long ago when he had made his first pay as a professional mathematics teacher. It wasn’t a big house, it could barely fit two people with its dwarf bedroom, kitchen and sitting room, but the situation needed it to accommodate three livelihoods with the potential of an extra body later on. So they walked and walked to the bus stop that was very far from Herod’s farm, taking moments to catch their breath and relax a bit.

Melody didn’t speak to her no matter how she tried to make small talk with her for the journey was long and begged for the vocally blessed to take center stage. Ten... twenty... thirty kilometers, the journey seemed not to end, and if ever its toll could be shown to anyone for illustrative purposes, Melody’s face would be a Picasso of it. Born to the town and city life, she was used to gliding past mileage through the comforts of a car and vast city buses, but this phase in her life was the worst thing she had ever felt and experienced. She was happy when she was married to Herod’s son at first, having the best of the city life for the first four years of their marriage as her husband had to finish his studies.

However, this year was the real devil in Prada for her. They had to relocate to the rural area because Herod’s son had been culturally instructed by his elders to come, talk and stay in the land of his ancestors for a time if he ever wanted to have kids, for his situation was a traditional one. So they left everything, her friends, her blood family, the milk-and-honey lifestyle, for a cause that didn’t even succeed because of a village girl. Herod was the owner of the big house they used to live in before, but being disowned meant that Herod’s son had to find and stay at his own house. Finally, they arrived at the bus stop and boarded a bus to a city that had its own good times and edgy moments. They arrived eventually to town, looking like mud house builders who have never taken a bath. For those that knew Melody and her husband before, this sight would have been quite a picture for the comedy archives. Dirt was all over their faces, hair, clothes and shoes but the thing with hardships is that you lose the care and damn at a certain point for life itself, for everything will seem the same whether good or bad.

For the “village thief”, this experience was like the best thing that can happen to a human being during his or her lifetime. The city had huge lights compared to their village fires, the people smelled nice and looked fresh. Buildings were astonishing; she even saw the town hall that had a clock with a bell that made so much noise like a gong they had to alarm them of village meetings. This was the real life; she could feel it in her veins.

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After almost forty-five minutes, they arrived at the house, and it looked like a giant spider web of grass and weeds wanted to rip it apart. Immediately they went in and took chronological showers with the village girl being the last to bath. When they were done, they went to prepare a meal at the kitchen, but Melody said since she was in charge, she would cook tomorrow, so it was up to the village thief to step up for the day. She agreed peacefully with the idea that maybe Melody would be at least dealing with the situation outside, in the yard but Melody was relaxing on the old and dusty sofas they had with Herod's son, who was too tired to even open his eyes. This made her a bit angry for she was used to the workaholic nature of rural women, but life had surely introduced her to the laziest person she had ever seen, she thought, as she made pap and the beef stew. They ate like cannibals at a free meat festival because hunger had oppressed them since they had boarded the bus to the city.

She was too tired to attend the bad situation outside, so she decided to wash the plates and sleep so that she could deal with it early in the morning. However, because the bed was small, and there was no way Melody would budge, she had no choice but to sleep on the floor.

## Chapter 8

"Krukuuu... Krukuuu", sang the early birds. It was morning, a new day for a new endeavor, activity and adventure. She woke up to the discomfort of the concrete floor and dirty carpet. The yard first! She arose in high spirits and smiling. Finally, she was in town, a place full of opportunities and unlimited possibilities for those who dared to dream above and beyond. At first, she removed the weeds and blackjacks all over the place and raked the yard. Then she swept it and cleaned the whole house whilst Melody and their husband were asleep. Funnily enough, she was the one pregnant, but because she kept it secret, no mercy was shown to her and Melody was the worst. The day passed along with Herod's son going out to look for a job.

Melody had a catching up session with her gossipful and judgmental friends that looked at the village thief like an alien out of space. To them, she looked like a maid that wore oversized and bad looking clothes. She totally felt out of place at her new home with them present. However, she was strong and not easily moved; therefore, she distanced herself from them and pruned the small mango trees.

The next day was more of the same, their husband was job searching while Melody went out with her friends, and she was left alone to tend to the house that nobody really wanted or loved. On the third day, she wanted to do something different too, to go out and see the city. Therefore she tagged along with her husband, which Melody didn't like, but she did it anyway. To town they went and boy did she love it. He bought her some toiletries, panties and new clothes, which she was very grateful for.

However, Melody's grocery bag was significantly smaller compared to hers, and this made her afraid of the disagreements and quarrels that could arise from this because Melody was very jealous and spiteful. They spent the whole day shopping with the little reserves that Herod's son had left.

She also wanted to find a job and assist the family as she knew that their husband would have a hard time sustaining and providing for both of them. So she asked her husband to assist her to look for a job, but he jokingly told her that people in town don't hire chubby women because it is a sign of riches and wellbeing. Perhaps he could see the big secret hidden under her garments, but she was a natural master of disguise and she kept her cool. Still, no one knew the truth.

## Chapter 9

As they approached the gate to their house, she could almost feel the change in mood. Alone with her husband, they had the most epic times and picture-perfect moments. But as soon as Melody was around, everything went stale. She unpacked the groceries in the kitchen, taking huge care not to touch nor break the first wife's gifts. Melody was in a very jovial mood, she had spent the day with her friends and young sister that looked like a customized mini version of her.

There was no mistaking the fact that they shared the same blood for she was also loud-mouthed and over-confident like her older sister. In African tradition, elders systematically and periodically send a spy in the form of a close relative or family member to check on the livelihood and health of their blood

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children. If things are good, the relative generalizes the report back home in as normal and expected a way as possible.

However, if there are unprecedented and alarming changes that directly oppress and depress their family member, urgent change and family meetings are held up with the in-laws to address any queries and discomfort. In this case, nothing was rosy or worth the ululations that many had spent effort perfecting during Herod's son and Melody's wedding.

It was a broad daylight disaster, and a daily fiasco as the sister-in-law was briefed and vividly indoctrinated by Melody. She had the same hate and look that Melody showed the village thief, but hers was deeper. Herod's son was happy to see his young sister-in-law but was also aware of her intended visit. The village girl, on the other hand, had no hole or place to hide because if Melody's company alone felt like a nightmare, that of two Melody's would surely feel like the last nail in a coffin. She was very shaken by this eventuality and reality. When she tried being modest and respectful by greeting Melody's young sister, the sister-in-law asked her if she was the new maid or was she looking for a piece job. Being a wife without true dignity and belonging was very sad and unfair, but this was just the beginning of a series of pure evil and inhumane acts by the two sisters.

After they had eaten some supper, their husband tried to cool the air and properly introduce her to his sister-in-law but he wasn't ready for the outcome that followed. The sister-in-law didn't waste time with false pleasantries and politeness, she scorned the husband on why he had taken another wife and let alone a village girl. He tried to defend his decision, but Melody's younger sister was a trainee lawyer; thus, it was a flawless victory to her even before the debate began. If the neighborhood had to testify of the noise they had heard, they would have sworn that Herod's son was being bullied and abused by these women because they were speaking over him openly with no holds barred. Tempers were very high, evil thoughts lurking and chaos not very afar off.

As the sister-in-law and her brother-in-law were going at it word-to-word, Melody took the opportunity to attack the village girl. She cursed her and kept shoving her head against the wall, and that was enough for the village girl. For someone who was negatively looked upon and ill-treated, she wasn't a cheeky or violent person, but that day was made for action classics.

She rose up in one quick step, motion and thunder slapped Melody against the old sitting room sofa. Melody fell crushingly hard on the long sofa. Melody fainted, and everyone was in shock for the echo of that slap could have blindly fooled a believer to be similar to the sound that the walls of Jericho made when they fell to the trumpets of Israel. It was epic and loud, even the neighbors came over to see if the local electrical transformer had blown or something had fallen out of the ever pouring sky for the sound and noise had been heard all over.

The sister-in-law was quick to call the police and ambulance, and Herod's son had just frozen from all of these events. It was astonishing how a good day can go from a plus ten to a quick minus ten. He was short for words, but he had to man-up quickly and find his tongue because the police were on their way, and so was the ambulance. This had escalated way too far, and it was not a private family matter anymore. Even a local journalist and neighbor was present to see and assess what had taken place.

## Chapter 10

"What happened here? Who provoked who? Who hit who? And why? What were the others doing whilst this was happening?" asked the detective. It already felt like a courtroom for the perpetrators. A large mob had gathered around their homestead to be the local judge and jury if the police dared to entice their ever biased and complicated conclusions. "This imbecile began everything, and she is the one who hit my sister with that metal pot on the head and cheek!" said Melody's younger sister with fury and rage all over her face. If lies had a color, these would be green indeed for these were beyond the common white lies that people do tell from time to time. But Melody's younger sister didn't care about what her statement and claim had on the village girl's future. This was a huge crime, especially in the big city where the law was as strict and harsh as a grandmother's distaste for young girls' bad morals.

Realistically, it could mean about a year in jail, depending on the severity of the injuries suffered by



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the victim and the evidence against the accused. The toughest test now was literacy and composure. Unfortunately for the village girl, the police had sent a white lady detective that had zero tolerance for the disjointed vernacular speech that she was about to say.

Melody's younger sister was born and bred in the city and was very sharp in her control of the English language. She manipulated the situation quickly because she knew the village girl needed some interpretation, to say the least, in order to understand the serious case she was now in.

Seeing and feeling the judgmental air that was being breathed by the multitude gathered around, she finally thought about words to say back. "She talk talk... push push my head, and I boom boom once on the cheek," she said as she used gestures to showcase the highlights of what had transpired. The crowd laughed their hats off, this girl had just spoken Greek in a Colosseum of pure blood and radical Romans.

She was outnumbered and out favored completely, but she had one card to play. Herod's son had been surprisingly quiet all this time as if he wasn't getting involved at all. He was scared of his name and face appearing on the local newspaper and news bulletin on TV for his nemesis journalist neighbor was also present among the crowd taking notes and gathering data. But this wasn't the time for selfishness or personal prestige. Someone had done ill to someone else, and unfortunately someone got violated through all of this.

Definitely, the jail cells were cringing in delight for their next victim to close in but who was it going to be? Asked by the police about the whole situation, Herod's son became Judas! He claimed that he and his sister-in-law were in a different room talking and catching up when they heard the sound that the neighborhood had heard. It was like Melody, even in her temporary unconscious state, was the puppeteer, and everyone else was her puppets. Even though unconscious, she was winning.

So the police hand-cuffed the village girl for further questioning at the police station whilst Melody was being strapped to a sleeping bed by the medics in their van. As this was happening, Melody suddenly woke up as they were about to put her lifeless body in the car.

"Stop! It's all a huge misunderstanding," said Melody as they were about to shove the criminal inside the police vehicle opposite the hospital van. It was both a miracle and very confusing what had just transpired.

The hater had turned over a new leaf in a few hours just because of a personal hand to hand with "the intruder".

Everyone turned their attention to the patient who had just woken up from an apparent slumber. She didn't look jaded or seriously hurt in any way physically, but her ego was bruised. What hurt her the most was that she lost a fight in her own home where she thought all the odds favored her the most. Life was truly a learning curve, Melody thought. She was married to a weak man, she finally realized.

As much as the perpetrator was wrong, her husband was also as wrong as she was. It tore her apart internally every time she would look at the picture frames of good times that would never be found again. She had a choice: to be patient and maneuver her plan personally or let the police deal with the "village problem" as she termed her. But pain had taught her to be attentive and, most importantly, to take revenge when the tide was silent, and the winds were calm. "There shall be no case against this woman, I just fell and fainted, that's all," Melody said.

Everyone was shocked by this. How could she even say those words? Melody's sister was still furious at her! The police tried to convince her to open a docket against the village thief, but she played it down and withdrew the case. It was a waste of time and energy, the police felt, and left. And so did the ambulance. The mob was still in disbelief, especially the journalist because this was new to him. He tried to get a scoop from Melody because such stories make big news and huge money, but Melody bluntly told him to never set foot again in her house. This seemed amusing and amazing to Herod's son, he loved what Melody had done and said so. But a big pot was boiling, and the only ingredient left to be added was the meat.

Someone had to die, Melody thought. It was the only way out of all of this, and she wanted to do it personally to make sure it played out as she wanted to have it. It would begin with her saving the second wife from going to jail then she would act nicely and very lovable to everyone. When they relax, Lord have mercy on them, for I will become death, the eater of worlds, she consented with a devilish

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grin. Her sleep was long enough for her to come to this sudden and insane conclusion, but her mind was made up.

The only thing left was time and for her to put a patient siege over her prey and victim to be. If only the victim knew that their days were numbered, she looked at the skies for a shooting star as if to wish upon it and seek support but the night was a very dark one. And so the thief was safe, the sister-in-law mad, Herod's son ashamed and embarrassed, but Melody was very calm and cool. She insisted that they all forget about this day and pray as a family about it and that her sister should accept the second wife as her sister too. It was awkward, everyone thought she was insane and that the fall might have done more damage to her than people thought, but they listened to her demands for they were all trying to cater and care for her as prescribed by the medics.

## Chapter 11

"Is everything okay, big sis'?" asked Melody's younger sister. She still couldn't believe what had happened the previous day. Of all the people she knew, her big sis was never the one to forgive and forget easily. At one point when they were younger, she used to revenge so much at everyone who trespassed against her that they called her "the wave" because of her assurance of ill will. But as they grew up, she had matured and became the role model her younger sister never thought she would be. Melody replied her calmly and intellectually.

"Once upon a time, there was a queen called Cleopatra, a golden jewel of Egypt, deepest pits of beauty! She lived well and suffered as history alludes, but what I like about her is how she handled her hardships. With patience and calm young sis! You see, true pain and vengeance lie on the impact of the evil brought upon, but death goes beyond. Death brings forth tears and sadness, but necessary death brings upon a new era, new life, fresh air, eternal peace," Melody said with a cold dark stare at her sister. Her young sister had never seen this side of her; she was afraid of her and yet felt her pain and guile desires. Melody's words left her with one question to verify something.

"Who do you need gone Melody and how and when?" asked her young sister.

"Herod's son will not make me conceive any children, and the village girl has been a thorn in my life ever since we met her," said Melody.

"We are not getting any younger, and we come from a family of black ships that have cut across currents all the time," added her young sister.

There was silence for a bit between them as they both felt the pain of being brought up under a roof where they were viewed as investments and baby-makers! Born and bred by the orphanage, their parents had abandoned them at a tender age, and despite being adopted by their foster ones, who showed periodic love to them, they had to survive and push through the misfortunes and unfairness rubbed upon their faces daily by their foster siblings. Growing up wasn't a trap to them as many people usually cry, but it was freedom and peace finally. However, the last few months reminded Melody of all the pain and unfairness that she and her sister had suffered when they grew up.

Their biological mother had left them a book called *The Passage to a Human's Heart* the day she went rogue on them. In the book, there was a section about mushrooms that Melody was very keen about. She loved mushrooms and so did her husband because it was the thing she knew how to cook better than anyone else. The book stated the basics of how to cook mushrooms and serve them, but they also gave something more, an idea and yes, a precaution!

Mushrooms are good for high blood pressure, proteins and boosting the immune system, but the bad ones kill very sorrowfully. Melody knew this very well, and she knew how to pick the right ones and leave away the deadly ones. However, in this case, she wanted a "killer dish". Food that would literally fulfil and yet destroy both the body and soul. So the plan was to commit murder through the nourishing and finer things in life, food! She told her young sister of her plan, and she was very shocked.

Hate alone was fulfilling enough for the young sister, but this was beyond her capacity as a human being. At first, she was lost for words, but she finally mastered the power to speak her mind out.

"For me, this is too much big sister, I think you have to stop it right now, we can always leave if it's that bad," she said. But Melody had already packed her bags because she knew how her young sister

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would react, and she understood her concern, but this was no arena for mercy.

A lot was at stake and Melody knew that she couldn't risk involving her young sister on her devious plan, so they hugged it out and cried together as they said their goodbyes. The young sister cried the most because she knew this could be an end to many things, but she couldn't do anything about it because she had promised Melody, the only blood relative she had in the world, not to say anything to anyone. She said her goodbyes to her brother-in-law and even to the village girl who looked fatter than ever before. In her heart and mind, she was torn apart because she was an indirect accomplice to a potential murder, and this could spoil her law career, among other things.

However, she understood that there are things that only family can do for family, and this was that time. So finally Melody was left with her husband and the other wife and that day was her turn to cook a meal that she promised everybody would like because, so she said, it was from the heart.

## Chapter 12

If you were to compare something deeply, really compare, then this dish was top chef material. The aroma alone would have anyone who smelled it breathing huskily with hunger. It was the good food that wishers wine and dine on with their eyes and imagination on TV shows but never got to ever taster personally. Everybody was filled with anticipation for supper. The village girl even assisted in the serving of the food because her hunger levels had gone up a notch since she was eating for two. Prayer was the only thing left before everybody dug in with their forks and knives, and their husband offered to bless the food.

"Dear Lord, as we are about to eat, may we take every bite with gratitude and always remember that nourishment comes from above and within, we are sinners, evildoers but through your mercy we re-live a life in the hope and faith that we are doing and living a Christian life and that you will always stand with us, thank you, Jesus, thank you Father, in the name of Christ our Lord, amen!"

"Amen," everybody said. But Melody was crying silently as her husband was praying. She said it was tears of joy when they asked her, but that prayer reminded her of all the evil she had done in the hours prior to dinner.

Things had escalated quickly, and the deed was done. The poisonous mushrooms were served to one plate in particular. It was evil at its worst, but it was a necessary evil, she reassured herself. Only one spoon was enough to make her plan a success. She had carefully placed the plates so that her victim would surely pick the plate. The village girl and her husband were oblivious to the situation at hand. One of them was about to die painfully, but who was it?

The village girl was Melody's nemesis in reality. She was pregnant and also HIV positive, although she didn't disclose this to anyone until now. After the prayer, she asked for a word before they eat, and they sat up attentively to listen to her.

"As you know, I indeed told you that I am an orphan and that I come from a village far and abroad in the veld and mountains. But I have never told you my real story, the real reason I came to your father's farm from the beginning!" Her words took everybody aback and they became seriously attentive. They were listening to another episode of more drama, Melody thought, but even she wasn't ready for the news to come.

"My father raped me and made me HIV positive. I am the firstborn of the king and queen of cheap liquor and poverty itself. My mother didn't believe me when I told her about what dad had done, nor did my aunt. I was labelled a liar and a disappointment in my family, and that tore me apart.

The day I came to your father's farm was the day after I ran away from all of the abuse and drama in my life. I didn't mean to involve my problems in your lives and bring hardships into your home, but I was afraid, hurt and in need of help. I know I don't deserve your remorse, love and forgiveness, but I couldn't keep it any further from you seeing that I am pregnant with a child conceived out of forced incest!" After her words, there was dead silence.

Herod's son finally understood why she would avoid any sexual advances he made under the pretence of saying they had to have a white wedding at first. This was a person who was not only damaged to the core, but she was broken in ways beyond the normal. Of course, she had her flaws



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as a human being and young lady, but what her family did to her was typical “hell” material. She had conned them all to some degree, but you had to see for yourself to understand how deep this mess was.

Melody finally got it why this girl was very unusual and jumpy sometimes. She had hated her for so long that she had never even bothered to go deeper and ask her the real questions that matter like her lineage, among other things. Being born and suffering most of her life, she understood the village girl’s story completely. For the first time ever, she felt love towards her and pity. She went over and comforted her, and they both cried in each other’s arms. It was a very sensitive experience that only a woman can relate to another fellow lady in soul and mind. Melody felt her pain, and it made her cry even more because she had ill-treated a pregnant and abused woman, besides her deceit.

Everybody’s feelings were all over the place. Herod’s son also joined in the hug, and they prayed again, crying and laughing about how they all look ugly when they cry. After this revelation, they sat down to talk more and eat. Herod’s son took a bite, and so did the village girl. The food was amazing; they both thanked Melody, but Melody had suddenly turned pale with regret. The whole situation had made her have second thoughts, and just as she was about to take the plates away from them before they ate the poisonous mushrooms, they had quickly taken bites due to hunger and the time they had spent talking and comforting each other. Melody froze, and she was so regretful of her act, that a stroke hit her suddenly.

## Chapter 13

She fell down on her chair, shaking all over the place. Herod’s son was shocked by this, but his masculine nerves kicked in, and he reacted fast to try and hold her and make sure she didn’t bite her tongue off because the stroke had left her totally incapable of controlling herself. But as they were focused on attending to Melody and calling an ambulance, Herod’s son felt a sharp cut and tingling feeling in his stomach, it was like something was stabbing him from the inside. He groaned and coughed out huge saliva of blood and chunks of what seemed like meat.

The village girl being the one on the phone in a feat to request an ambulance dropped the phone in disbelief. It was like her ancestors had cast a deep and dark voodoo spell on her every time she seemed to begin enjoying her life. At first, it was Melody, and now it was her husband shaking all over and spitting tons of saliva and blood all over. She froze not able to contemplate or think straight. At her village, she had heard stories of people dying due to being poisoned, but this was real, and she couldn’t help but beg the earth to devour her also for this was too much. If she was to survive such an ordeal, surely she was going to be hanged or go to jail for life because no one was going to believe her. She could almost see the headlines stating that a homewrecker kills two in a feat to take claim of everything. This was reality waiting to unveil itself, she thought.

As she was busy thinking, panicking and speaking in hieroglyphics to the telephone attendant, she could feel both her husband and Melody exchanging screams of pain, groans and bubbles of saliva. It felt like two volcanos had erupted at the same time, and no one could stop the carnage that they were coughing out. She managed to convey her message and the telephone attendant finally got what she was saying. But as she was screaming and shouting for them to hurry, only one person was left coughing and groaning. Melody had suddenly gone quiet. The village girl panicked even more.

She noticed that Melody’s head had expanded a bit due to the stroke. You could still see the smile she always had as she lay there, beautiful, wide-eyed and quiet. It was as if she was cut short by some supernatural phenomenon before she could say what she wanted to say for her eyes were fixed at the village girl, but her mouth was closed and full of blood-stained saliva. She had died out of the guilt of her own actions.

To hell or heaven? Only God knew, but one thing became certain to her in a sudden revelation: Melody wanted to murder one of them. The village girl began to play back the moments prior to this incident, and it was sad that the people she was laughing with and talking to a few minutes ago were both laying down with one dead and the other fighting for his life.

She cried and screamed, calling for help from her neighbors, but no one heard her because there was a loud celebration nearby with powerhouse musicians and classic bands. Most of the locals had gone there to attend this rare occasion.

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She even thought of telling Herod's son to shut up in order for her to tell him that Melody had died – her mind was all over the place. But what would it have achieved for he was in a battle for his own life? He cried and groaned in pain as the poison continued to cut him through and through all over his internal body parts.

Finally, he took one last gasp, and that was it. The village girl was mortified and didn't believe what was happening. She thought that it was just a bad dream, so she pinched herself hard and the reality of what had just happened began to set in. Two corpses were laying down on her feet, two people whom she had been judged to have disturbed and brought about ill will and intentions to their peace and home. It was a classic story for the gossip columns and communal haters.

She cried uncontrollably as she closed both her husband and Melody's eyes. The ambulance was on its way, but it was too late. She knew that her fate was sealed because there was no way she was going to survive the bias scrutiny of the entire community and let alone the police that had intended to arrest her in the first place.

Looking at the dining table and the food still laid down there, she wondered if the plate that Herod's son had taken was really made for him or her. However, as the scripture postulates, let the dead tend to the dead and the living to the living but in the village girl's case, she had no one to ask or share opinions with. One bite would seal the deal she thought.

No one would know what had truly happened if she too was in the land of the dead. At one point, she thought of running away, but she was eight months and two weeks pregnant, she knew it would be a slow death either way because she wouldn't get far without being caught and that would have made matters even worse for her than they were right now. So she took a pen and paper and did as most suicides do, writing down a letter.

*Dear unborn child, I am your mother and I love you so much. You will hear so many stories about me, and most of them will be unpleasant, but the truth is that I tried my best to do right by everyone. I know you are going to grow and be a champion and have the world chanting at your feet with success. It's funny how I picture you with a strong jawline and brown hazelnut eyes. Many hearts are going to be broken surely with your charm and good looks. But remember to be real and methodic always and to never be like your father and granddad! You deserve to know the truth about who he was, but as a mother, I would like you to know that your only father is the Lord in heaven, for that is as real as it gets. The papers will say I killed these people out of spite and jealousy, among other fabricated lies they can think of.*

*But the real story is that your older step-mom tried to poison me, but instead she unfortunately poisoned your stepdad by mistake. She died from a stroke and shock, and he died due to the severe poisoning. I never wanted to make the choice of leaving you before you were born, my child, but fate chose my destiny before I had a say in how my future would unfold. Your birthday is always going to be a marker of pain and grief, but be of good cheer, for your mom will always be with you in spirit and, when the times are tough, remember to pray always.*

*I was an athlete, can you imagine? Fast and powerful on the track but I hope you exceed and excel more than I did. Hopefully, you will have so many gifts and talents that you would have a hard time doing one thing at once. Education is key my child, I was poorly educated because my parents used to drink all my school fees away and never catered to my academic needs as a child, therefore, I was unfortunate. But I got a chance at redemption through you, to live and learn through you and be proud of the skills learnt and lessons appreciated. I love you, sweet child. To the foster parents that will have you, may the dear Lord bless them abundantly and increase their territory...*

*The mother that will hold and love you in spirit forever.*

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When she had finished writing this letter, she sealed it and placed it on the table close to the kitchen door where anyone coming in would see it. The plan was to hang herself when she heard the ambulance sirens getting closer so that she could die, but give a window for the medics to dissect her and save her baby.

Option two was to eat the poisoned meal and hope that they find it too late to save both her and the baby, thus making them choose to save one. She chose the second option and ate the poisoned mushrooms. At first, she felt numb and painless, maybe because she expected the experience to kick in at once. She was surprised at the feeling of it all. It was strangely normal at first. After some minutes, however, she started feeling woozy. Then it felt like a sudden rush of burning and stabbing sensations all over her body. She knew it had begun, and there was no turning back now.

As she positioned herself to the floor in pain next to the two human corpses, she began to reflect and relive her life again and again before the real pain and pool of blood and saliva took over. If she didn't have HIV/AIDS, maybe she could have met the boy of her dreams and lived happily ever after. Life was unfair. Surely, if she didn't go to Herod's farm in the first place, everyone else would be still alive and happy, but people make their own choices and Melody had made the worst possible one for everybody.

She thought about her siblings, how they would grow up, and who would help them from the abuse and vulnerability at home. The future was undeniably bleak for them too, but it was too late. She had eaten of the forbidden, and judgement awaited her in body and soul. Finally, she began to convulse and roll over in pain as the first puddles of blood-stained saliva began to flow. She didn't cry or groan at all like her husband and Melody had done because she actually believed this was better than living.

The ambulance arrived shortly, and then medics came speeding into the house with stretcher beds and what they found was shocking. Two lifeless bodies and one vibrating and rolling body bag of human saliva and blood. What a picture this was! They acted fast. They restrained her on a stretcher and carried her to the van, and then they called the police and forensics team to attend to the potential murders and crime scene. The ambulance was driven by a driver made for the Formula 1 arena, he was fast as lightning, and yet very steady with the wheel. Along the way, the vibrating and rolling continued although she was restrained and during all this process they gave her some injections and some anti-poison medicine to counter the poison inside her before it reached the baby.

But it seemed like it wasn't working because, at some point, she faintly overheard the medics say that her kidneys were shutting down, and so were her lungs. Everyone was conformed consigned to the reality that she and the baby would not make it. In her mind, she was in a world of her own: peaceful, quiet and free. However, a voice came to her telling her that she had to go back and it wasn't time yet. As she was asking whose voice it was, she saw Herod's son and Melody smiling at her and telling her that it's alright, her baby needs her, and so does her family!

Suddenly she awoke from her slumber to the reality of fighting for her life and that of her baby; she knew that she didn't want to die anymore. She had found reason to live again, and that was the moment her body began to react to the medicine she was given by the nurses.

The van finally got to the hospital, and they took her to a room where the doctor attended to her. However, there were complications that had unfortunately developed because of poisoning herself. She needed a quick and urgent operation in order to save her child, and the doctor hurriedly told her that her ovaries had been affected too, therefore, she was going to take them out. This meant she was no longer going to have kids again and that she might still die if the operation didn't go as planned. It would be a premature birth, but it had to be done to save lives, and so they took her to the theatre for the operation.

Some hours passed, and the procedure went well. She had astonishingly given birth to twins, one girl and a boy. The doctors were shocked about how this could be because the ultrasound they quickly took while preparing for surgery only showed one heart, and yet mysteriously enough, it was two. It was difficult to see and discern because they were at the same place and seemed like one giant heartbeat, and the shape seemed like it was only one child, but there were two. After some time she finally woke up, drowsy and weak from the whole experience, and she tried to move her neck to the left to see where she was and who was making noise next to her. She saw two beautiful and healthy babies, and she was also in shock!

Ouch! Her stomach! She touched it and felt the stitches. She was alive, and these babies were both



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hers. She couldn't believe it. She broke into tears of joy as she tried to move along the bed edge in order to touch them, but the nurses came in and stopped her for she could open up the stitches and create a bigger problem for herself. So they, in turn, brought her babies to her, and she couldn't stop crying and kissing them all over.

Against all odds, she was a mother and had the privilege of actually seeing them when she thought that death was the only option. For the next few days, she healed and bonded with her babies in hospital. After about two weeks, she began to wonder why the police hadn't come to question or hold her as a suspect to murder, was it all a dream? But as she was thinking deeply about it, Viola, Melody's younger sister came in the room. She was shocked that Viola was here, but at the same time happy because she was the only visitor that had come to see her so far when she had expected no one to come. They hugged gently and tenderly to avoid affecting the operation and Viola seemed calm and collected for someone who had just lost a family member.

Viola told her everything about how Melody had planned it all out and that she knew and that's why she gave a statement and told the truth in order to serve justice, as her profession demands. It wasn't even in the newspapers like the village girl thought it would be, everything had gone the opposite of how she thought it would. God is the King of all kings she sang in praise and happiness. She introduced Viola to her two babies, telling them that this was their aunt even though they couldn't understand what was happening or being said. And so they spent the visiting time together catching up on things from the outside world and on what to do when she was good to go out of the hospital. Viola wanted to help her look for sponsorships so that she could go to school and learn and at the same time find work to fend for her babies.

The village girl agreed, but she only said, "I will do this all in one condition, help me take proper justice against my parents. I want to take them to court so that they pay for their transgressions!" Viola agreed to help, but only if she was sure that this is what she truly wanted. The visiting time was about to end, and Viola opened her bag to give her the fruit that she had bought her and the suicide letter that the village girl had written in her darkest hour. She asked her where she had got it but Viola simply said, "It was this letter that made me tell the truth and stand up for you, we began in a rocky way you and I, but if you promise to love and care for my nephew and niece unconditionally, you are my sister for life from this day onwards."

When the siren rang for the visitors to go and leave the patients alone, Viola kissed her niece and nephew goodbye and hugged her sister. As she was striding towards the door, Viola paused for a moment and asked her sister what the babies' names were? And she said, "Blessings."

Viola was lost and didn't understand what this meant, and so she asked again saying, "Pardon?"

"Blessings! They shall be called Blessings, because they came from God to give me a second chance at life," she said.

And Viola walked away smiling and shaking the ground with her high heels as if to notify other people in the hospital that a miracle had just happened.

Finally, she was left alone to bond and care for her babies, her Blessings!



## Propain Cebekhulu

*Propain Cebekhulu was born in a small town called Estcourt in South Africa in 2000. He is a poet, writer and storyteller who proudly identifies himself as a Muslim. He is in first year at the University of the Free State. His aim is to tell untold stories that will provide solace through its contents. Propain says, "What sets me apart from the rest is that I don't think outside the box but, in turn, I tear it up."*

# The Eyes Tell a Story

## Propain Cebekhulu

It was a magnificent morning, the sun was shining and the birds were singing songs of hope, but sadly for me, there was no hope. I stood next to my father's death bed at the hospital and listened to his last words as he said, "Son, look into my hungry eyes, not even one blink, not a single demise, there is no despair hidden behind my pride, and I am a book that you can read by looking at me straight in the eyes."

After a moment of silence, I then responded by saying, "Father, I have looked into your eyes, and what I saw should never be disguised because it misguides those whose hearts are filled with hope for the future."

My father knew very well that he had reached the end of the road, and there is nothing he could do now besides waiting for the angel of death to come and claim his soul. I stood there looking at his pale face, wondering how could he leave us when he was healthy and come back as an invalid. As a child, I never knew my father and my mother hardly spoke about him, but she once told me that I had eyes like his. She told me that my father left her a long time ago and told her that he is going to look for greener pastures, but he never came back. I was three years old when he left, and my mother was four months pregnant with my little sister.

My mother was a strong woman (still is), and she worked with the scraps she was given in order to provide for me and my sister. The hard times polished my sister as I taught her to never depend on men and to trust no soul except the one she owns. I had so many questions that I wanted to ask my father, but time was of the essence, and I remembered what my mother used to say about time. She used to say, "By the token of time through the ages verily man is in loss, except those who have faith and engage in the mutual teachings of truth, patience and consistency."

Back then, I was too young to understand what she meant, but now everything is becoming vivid to me. My father wasted his youth chasing a mirage and never paid attention to what was in front of him. I used to listen to my mother cry at night. All she ever prayed for was for her only son not to become like his father. Even though she felt deserted and broken, she still had love for my father. She used to say to me, "Son, the reason we fall is to rise", and I knew then that I had to find my own way because this world is cruel and heartless. I felt as if I was denied my childhood, I was constantly looking after my mother and sister up to the point where I had no friends, and the only thing I knew was to survive.

The following verse was the only thing that got me through the day: "By the glorious morning light and by the night when it is still, thy Guardian Lord has not forsaken you nor is he displeased and verily the hereafter will be better for you than the present and he shall soon reward for which you shall be pleased. Did he not find you an orphan and gave you shelter and care? Did he not find you wondering and gave you guidance? Did he not find you in need and made you independent? Therefore do not treat the orphan with harshness nor repulse the petitioner. But the bounty of your Lord, read and proclaim."<sup>25</sup>

These words filled my spirit with wonder and awe, and I believed that there was a reason behind my suffering. My father and most people chose to repulse the petitioner, which is why they have many regrets about what could have been. I spent much of my childhood wondering about what I did to deserve this life.

When the chance came to ask my father, I just stood there with many things to say but no words to say it. I asked my father why did he leave us, but what I got was silence and more silence. I asked a second time with tears falling down my face and he never responded. I felt as if he had no words to explain himself, so I decided to ask him the name of his daughter. He did not respond, but he was trying to move his lips until the machines started making noises.

Many doctors came in and told me to evacuate the room, but I refused because I longed so many years for the chance to meet my father. He held my hand tightly, and said in a shallow voice, "Only if you knew", and he closed his eyes for the last time. I looked into his lifeless face and said to him, "This isn't goodbye, even as I watch you die. I swear I won't cry, not even one tear will be shed from my eyes." The doctor standing next to me looked at me with eyes filled with wonder. He wondered how I could not cry when I had just lost my father; he did not know that my anger could not let me feel for a stranger.

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<sup>25</sup> Quran, Surah 93: Al Duha (The Glorious Morning Light).





# Visual Stories





## Olabode Ajiboye

*Olabode Ajiboye is a graduate in mechanical engineering at the University of Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria. He works as a freelance illustrator for storyboards and comic books, and an animator in the growing animation industry in Nigeria. He is trying to carve a niche by telling stories of African characters and superheroes far from the stereotype of flying men in spandex of the west and rural village settings believed to be African. He takes this approach because he believes nothing stays the same forever, and even culture evolves.*

# KOZE

FALLEN HERO



CREATED BY  
OLABODE AJIBOYE



FIGHTING TO LIVE" VERY FEW PEOPLE UNDERSTAND  
THE MEANING OF THIS PHRASE.



BREATHE  
BREATHE



YOU'RE  
GETTING KILLED  
OUT THERE WETIN  
YOU DEY  
DO?

YOU'RE  
BETTER THAN  
THIS GUY  
NAH!

WALE IKUKOYI FATHER, BOXER LAGOS BUS  
DRIVER KNOWS THIS MORE THAN ANYONE

PREPARING FOR ROUND 7 OF A BOUT  
HE IS SUPPOSED TO THROW THOUGH...



NA ONLY  
HIM RIGHT DEY  
THIS FIGHT, FORCE  
HIM TO HIS  
LEFT

SET  
HIM FOR A  
HOOK

HE CLEARLY CAN WIN



SHEY  
YOU HEAR  
ME?

HUH!..  
YES









# Gary Louw

A case of religious fundamentalism and its implications for the youth artist's creative autonomy

*Introduction by Bronwyn J King*

South African author Olive Schreiner wrote, 'If Jesus were on the earth now it is very certain he would not be a Christian'. Do you find this statement shocking, or is it sobering? Schreiner strongly criticised some forms of Christianity she encountered, calling them 'savage' and 'un-Jesus-like', but she always thought highly of the person of Christ. She was not so much concerned about religious faith as the perversion of it.

It is interesting that Schreiner wrote about this more than one hundred years ago, but it is probably more true than ever before. About two years ago, I edited a collection of real-life accounts describing individual experiences in various churches around South Africa. These unsettling narratives and the many reports in the news recently certainly opened my eyes to what Schreiner was referring to.



# Introduction

*Bronwyn J King, JAY Lit Managing Editor*

The essay to follow concerns a case of Christian fundamentalism and hysteria and how it affects the youth artist's freedom of expression. We hope that you will take the time to contemplate and understand the artwork presented before drawing hasty conclusions. A few of the themes presented in the artwork are discussed below, though they are not discussed in detail in the essay. The essay focuses instead on certain criticisms of the artwork raised in social media and the news.

The collection was created for a matric art exhibit in October 2019 at a school in Durban, South Africa. It was filmed in contravention of the exhibit rules and the video was posted on YouTube, which quickly went viral. In the video, the artwork is criticised by a pastor who hysterically labelled it 'demonic'. A few readers might agree with this reaction as they look through the images, but the accompanying essay (as well as the detailed explanations that were part of the exhibit which the pastor ignored) explains the manner in which they came together and justifies the form they take.

Among the multi-layered issues in the artwork are that religion is, as widely reported in the news, used by unscrupulous people for financial gain, and it often has the effect of making people do unjustifiable and immoral things when they misinterpret or twist scripture. Indoctrination can be so severe that some cannot see how bad the problem is and they encourage and support corruption in religious institutions. An example is pastorpreneurship in poor communities, giving the excuse that 'my God is not poor', or that religious leaders can engage in corruption and exploitation as they deserve gratuitous wealth and power because they are, allegedly, God's agents. If we accept such reasoning, we also accept that the congregation of a corrupt religious leader deserves to be exploited and impoverished.

Some pastors in Africa own jet planes and luxury vehicles while the communities they preach to can barely feed, clothe and educate themselves. According to the Bible, Judas Iscariot was not only the disciple who betrayed Jesus, he was also guilty of financial corruption. He stole from the money that Jesus and his followers lived on. Pastorpreneurs aren't much different from Judas because they associate themselves with Christ for their own financial advantage.

Christian consumerism and Christian capitalism are a few of the themes which are more obvious in the artwork. The essay to follow elucidates further on the issues and events which shaped the collection, including hypocrisy, fundamentalist intolerance and bullying, and religious hysteria.



*"The Creation of Adam"*



# 'That's Satanic!': An elucidation of persecuted art in a Christian fundamentalist climate

Gary Louw



*"Alba Madonna"*

Religions may come and go but it is the art created by a society that is the true reflection of its nature. Ranging from broadly influenced political commentaries to explorations of the personal microcosm, observations made through art have always served as an effective diagnostic tool for better judging and understanding the circumstances under which that art was made – regardless of the espoused viewpoint of any government (or theocracy). Consequently, art has always served as one of the most efficacious means by which to enrage one's audience through confronting them with opinions they are perhaps too insecure to consider. After much controversy, I am writing this article to comment upon the manifestation of that exact phenomenon in response to my so-called 'Satanic' artwork that garnered much media attention in October 2019 after an apparently offended parent made my Grade 12 art exhibition viral on social media and in the news. This article will hopefully also serve the purpose of better elucidating the meaning of my critically misrepresented art.

In order for my viewers to better understand the artworks that had formed part of my Grade 12 exhibition, it is essential that they are cognisant of the circumstances under which those works were made. Despite having been a moderately devoted Christian for the majority of my youth, I underwent a transition towards Atheism at the beginning of adolescence. This shift in my metaphysical beliefs was largely motivated by a lifelong interest in the sciences that had eventually manifested itself as a healthy reading habit into the topics of science and philosophy. Through my exposure to ideas implicated in those areas of thought that are in direct contradiction with the teachings of religion (and in my case, Christianity) I was compelled to critically re-evaluate my interpretation of the world around me. Ultimately, the empirically justified teachings of science would bear more appeal to me than the poorly constructed (and often self-contradicting) anecdotes detailed in the Bible.

However, this rather personal affair would not bode well for me in my school life. For the entirety of my primary and secondary school career, I would attend a 'Christian-ethos' school that (by virtue of it advertising itself as 'Christian-ethos') evidently attracted those people most fond of the idea of institutionalised faith – including an abnormally large constitution of particularly backward-thinking



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Christian fundamentalists. Because of their abnormally large representation at my school (in combination with their inexplicable belligerence towards anyone who may have thought differently to them), Christian fundamentalist students (and a handful of particularly retrograde teachers) were able to fraternise with one another and (in the absence of the better-minded people present at the school) bully those students who were more progressive in their beliefs than what they had been indoctrinated to think was appropriate.

As a result of this unfortunate social dynamic, I (being an openly Atheist student) found myself on the receiving end of much religiously motivated prejudice. However, after having been exposed to the uglier side of Christianity, I (from my newly secular perspective) became increasingly interested in investigating the means by which such devout patrons of a supposedly ‘forgiving’ religion could become so belligerent. I took it upon myself, as an artist, to identify the societal mechanisms responsible for ingraining such hatred and insecurity into the minds of those who hide behind a thin facade of moral righteousness. Therefore, during my Grade 11 year, I decided to discuss the ideas I had surrounding organised religion in an art practical that was to be submitted for marking purposes. The practical would consist of two components and would include many visual and conceptual motifs that would act as precursors to those present in my final, Grade 12 exhibition. After completion, both components of the practical were submitted for display in the school foyer. One of the components of the practical was a preliminary version of my appropriation of Leonardo Da Vinci’s, “The Last Supper” (which would eventually be recreated in modified form as part of my Grade 12 exhibition). The most notable feature of this drawing (which would be carried over to its successor) was that it substituted Ronald McDonald into Jesus Christ’s position in “The Last Supper”. This served the purpose of commenting on the commercialisation of organised religion in a contemporary setting – suggesting that many institutions of faith have become preoccupied with using their influence as a means to garner monetary wealth and political reach instead of bringing about tangible benefits to society (often at the expense of the devout).

Before I was aware of anything having transpired, one of the more visually literate teachers at my school had recognised the subject matter of my drawing and drafted a petition to have the ‘blasphemous’ artwork removed from display. After expressing my dissatisfaction over how the



*"The Last Supper"*



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*"The Dead Christ Mourned ('The Three Maries')"*

matter was handled to my peers, rumours began to spread, and a particularly fanatical girl and her parents (who happened to be teachers) instigated an outright offensive against me and my art. They went so far as to fabricate evidence against me in an attempt to get me expelled.

It was at that point I determined to continue to pursue my critique of organised religion – not only for interest's sake but also to affirm that I would never moderate my own freedom of speech to conform to the canons of people who seek to destroy that very right. I had been violated as an artist and sought nothing more than to defend the sanctity of art and the right of every person to express their opinion – regardless of how irreverent that opinion may be or whether or not I would agree with it.

Over the course of the following twelve months, I spent my Grade 12 year creating my art in secret, making sure that nobody could see it, or was aware of its subject matter until the final exhibition. Contrary to what one might think, the opening of the exhibition was largely uneventful. I had not garnered nearly as vigorous a response from the Christian community as I previously did and it seemed as if I had finally overcome the persecution that had partly inspired me to pursue that avenue of expression. I felt as if I had finally been given some form of respect as an Atheist and that I had triumphed over the small-minded persecutions of the now silent fundamentalist demographic. However, I was soon to be proved terribly wrong in thinking that those who preached forgiveness could turn the other cheek. On the very last day of the exhibition, a pastor (who is also a parent with a child attending the school) walked through my display and made a video denouncing it that would later become viral. This is all in spite of the fact that there was a sign posted at the entrance of the display stating that any form of photography or recording was strictly prohibited and that the exhibition contained potentially offensive content that was to be reserved for a “mature and sophisticated audience”.

It is at this point that my artworks entered the public eye and thus at this point that I should elucidate their meaning – especially since the man who had assailed them made absolutely no attempt to understand their conceptual motivation.



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Gary Louw

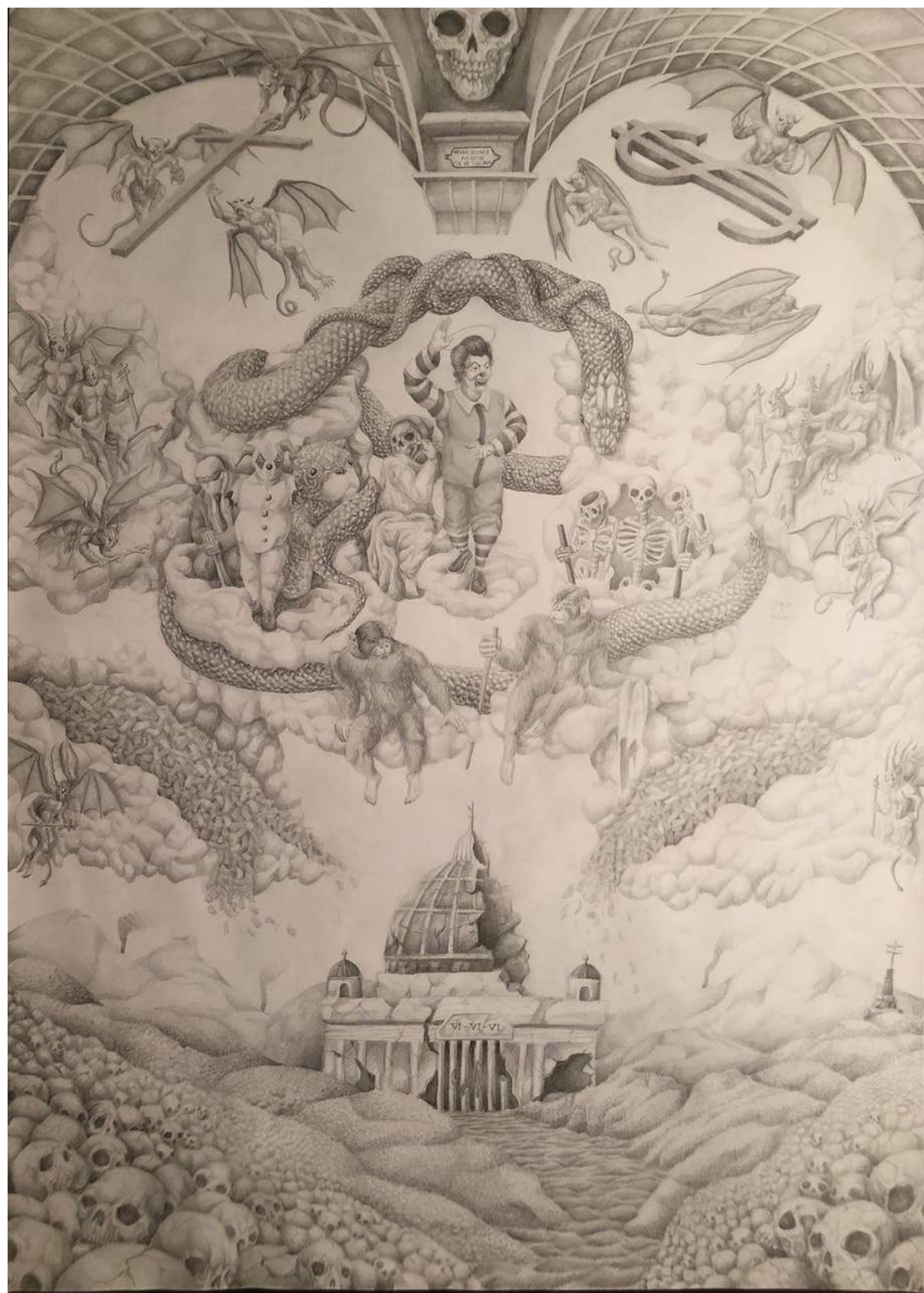
The first artwork that could be seen in the video was a piece entitled “Untitled (Blue and Red)”. This artwork was conceptualised and made the week proceeding the censorship of my first appropriation of “The Last Supper” (which was itself untitled). This artwork served as a means by which I could capture the feelings and ideas I had during the aforementioned turmoil and act as a conceptual springboard upon which I could base the rest of my exhibition.

The artwork itself was an anaglyph (a drawing consisting two visually distinct layers coloured in complementing hues). These two layers would become distinguishable from one another when viewed through coloured screens (in exactly the same fashion a pair of old 3D glasses would work). Through one screen the viewer would see an ink rendition of Ronald McDonald, through the other they would see the same character now crucified (with a number of different statements scrawled across the negative space of the composition).

One statement (which embodies one of the main sentiments meant to be expressed by the artwork) read, “first I ate, then you crucified me”. This is intended to point out the similarity between the story of Jesus’ crucifixion and the censorship of my original “Last Supper” drawing. As just was the case in the story of Jesus’ crucifixion, after Ronald McDonald had his proverbial ‘Last Supper’, he was equally persecuted – thus making him more akin to Jesus than what my opponents would be comfortable to admit.

The artworks seen next in the video were a series of five pencil drawings that appropriated compositions taken from (primarily Renaissance) devotional paintings. In each appropriation, characters involved in the biblical scenes depicted were replaced by symbols of consumerism (such as Ronald McDonald) so as to demonstrate the commercialisation of organised religion at the hands of those who recognised its profitability. These five drawings are thus supposed to retell a “pseudo-biblical” story in which devotional imagery is transformed to suit the aforementioned critique.

From this, it is easy to see that the main theme embodied by these first five artworks (and indeed “Untitled (Blue and Red)”) makes absolutely no remark upon the contents of the Bible nor do they identify themselves as being critical of Christianity in specific. Therefore, any claim that the artworks ‘target’ Christianity is largely unfounded as the artworks (in large part) are more concerned with the manner in which people believe what they believe instead of delivering a critique of the contents of



*"The Last Judgement"*



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their actual belief. In terms of any possible criticism of the contents of Christian belief, the more scathing subordinate themes of the drawings that were more critical of religious belief rather than practice were concerned with religious belief in all contexts – criticising phenomena such as fundamentalist creationism in all religions (not just Christianity).

Furthermore, the compositions (even though based upon distinctly Christian imagery) do not deliver a Christian-specific commentary. The observations made concerning the commercialisation of faith and the exploitation of the devout necessarily extend to all contemporary religions that organise themselves into devotional institutions. This is something that would have become abundantly clear if the pastor who had defamed my art had simply read the rationales I had supplied alongside each artwork. However, appealing to another man's literacy is, after all, too big a courtesy to ask in some cases.

The sequence of five drawings consisted appropriations of "The Creation of Adam" by Michelangelo, "Alba Madonna" by Rafael, "The Last Supper" by Leonardo Da Vinci, "The Dead Christ Mourned ('The Three Maries')" by Annibale Caracci, and "The Last Judgement" by Michelangelo. Each of these artworks explored ideas relating to the previously discussed commercialisation of organised faith, as well as a number of more nuanced, subordinate themes (such as the preoccupation of religious belief with the mortality of its believers as well as the conflicts between science and religion). These artworks (despite delivering potent commentaries upon religion) do not themselves disclose my own religious persuasion. It is for this reason that I had felt compelled to make a more introspective artwork for the next component of my Grade 12 exhibition.

"A Spectrum of Belief" served exactly this purpose and provided viewers with an opportunity to understand (at least in part) my own metaphysical beliefs as well as possibly relate their own experiences with faith to the archetypes I had presented them in the artwork. The artwork itself consisted a sculptural installation composed of five figures cast from a mould of my own body. The figures were cast from the waist up (excluding my arms) out of self-curing polyurethane foam. These were the sculptures depicted in the video that were covered (to a variable degree) with pages torn from a bible, spray-painted gold, and given (depending on their position within the installation) a set of variably sized 'devil' horns.

This artwork acted as a visual documentation of the evolution of my own metaphysical belief throughout my life – particularly depicting my transition from Christianity to Atheism. The extent to which each figure in the installation was covered in pages torn from a Bible reflected the degree of religiosity represented by that respective figure. When placed alongside one another, the figure on the leftmost side represented a mode of thought corresponding to dogmatic Christianity. As a result of this symbolism, the surface of that figure (save its horns and any stray tumorous growths) was completely covered in pages torn from a bible. In diametric opposition to this, the figure on the rightmost side of the sequence was devoid of any bible pages whatsoever. This was representative of the fact that that figure was symbolic of my (current) atheist mode of thought. Ultimately, this symbolic use of bible pages as a means to represent different stages of religiosity would manifest itself (upon the surface of the five figures) as a means by which a continuous, naturally evolving spectrum of different degrees of religious belief could manifest itself. Each figure in the sequence thus represented a different archetype of religiosity and was (apart from the extent to which they were covered in pages torn from a Bible) otherwise physically manipulated in order to symbolise the implications of that degree and brand of faith on the mind of the believer.

Over the course of the sequence's development, those features associated with higher degrees of religiosity in each figure would degrade until (in the last sculpture) the secular incarnation was represented. It is interesting to note that those characteristics associated with higher degrees of religiosity are in visual contrast with the underlying, gold surfaces of the figures. This is supposed to represent the inhibitive effect religion can have in the exploration of one's own personality – suggesting that in the establishment of one's own identity in their community, the indoctrinations of religion are ultimately detrimental. This demonstrates the externalised nature of religious thought – that one's religious beliefs are not inborn but instead something that is either imposed or sought after through one's own agency. A consequence of this canon is that the only lens through which one can truly observe themselves in an unbiased manner is through the lens of secular consideration.



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Due to the foam's proclivity to expand, it would often exploit weaknesses in the structure of the mould I had created and thus generate the voluminous, tumorous growths seen on the final sculptures. This phenomenon strengthened the work's representation of its concept by providing the viewer an aesthetic means by which they could visualise ideological non-conformism. The act of the polyurethane foam defying its own mould became reflective of my own rejection of Christianity and the (somewhat) inevitable pursuit of Atheism.

However, the growths present on these sculptures can be viewed in a somewhat more cynical light. If the viewer should be more inclined to interpret the growths as 'tumorous', they acquire a distinctly negative connotation as being some form of 'disease'. This relates to the idea of religion as some form of 'intellectual disease'. This is (evidently) a much more scathing critique of religious belief which I believe is represented in equal part alongside the alternative interpretation.



*A Spectrum of Belief*



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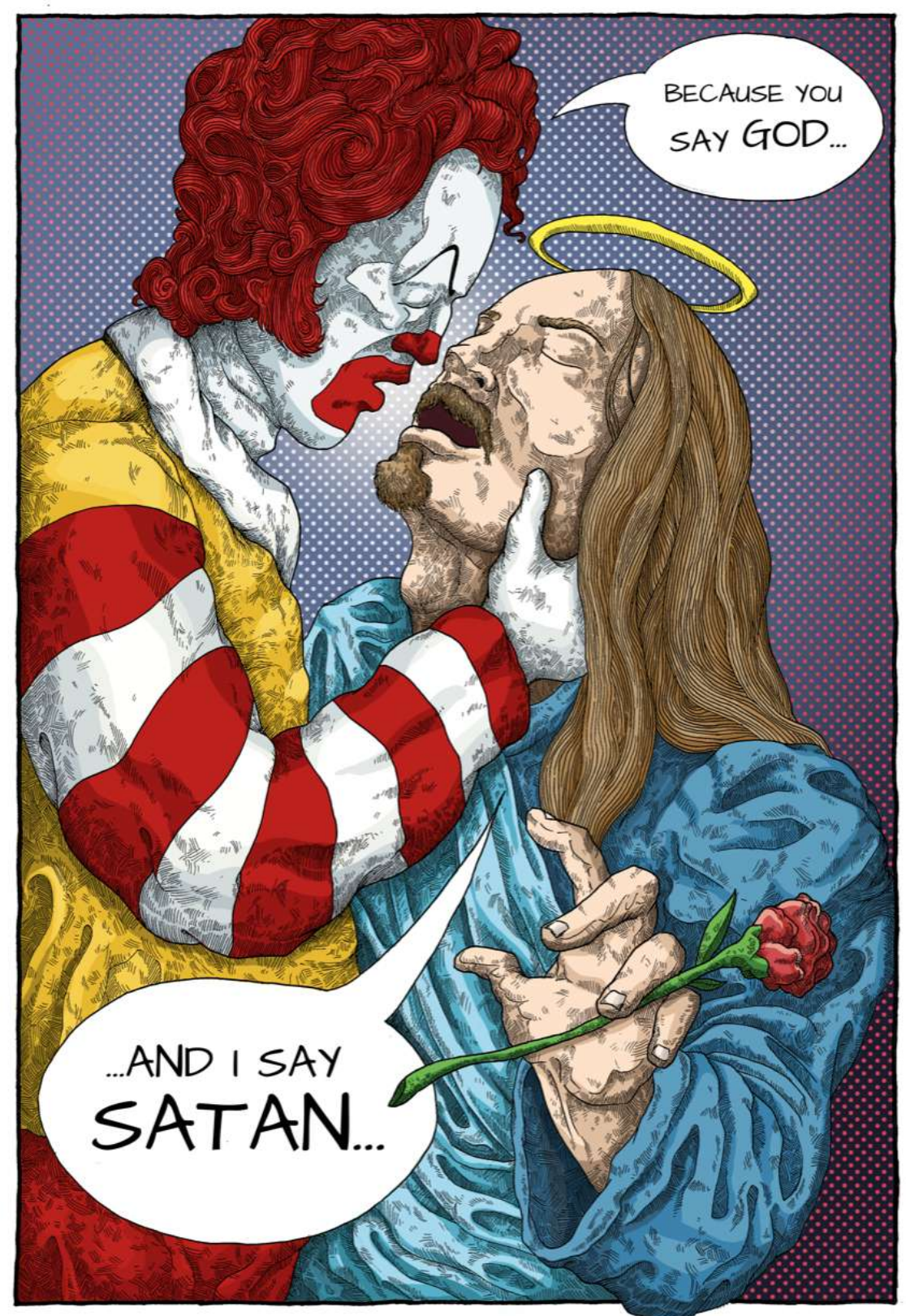
The next two artworks that had featured in the pastor’s video were (in order of their appearance) “You Have No Culture” (which depicted Ronald McDonald and Jesus Christ in a romantic embrace with one another) and “Good and Evil are Mere Sex Toys for the Meta-physical” (which depicted Jesus Christ and Satan in romantic juxtaposition with one another). Both of these artworks were digitally coloured ink drawings that were rendered in a Neo-Pop style. On a conceptual level, the two artworks discussed the structure of religious morality (particularly the symbolic morality espoused by many religions including Christianity) as well as the mismatch between what is practised and what is preached in the context of organised religion.

The choice to render both drawings in Neo-Pop style was motivated by the following two reasons. Firstly, the aesthetics of all the preceding artworks in the display aligned themselves more closely to the norms of Classical art than any other period. Even in the case of “A Spectrum of Belief”, even though not distinctly ‘classical’, the aesthetic explored displayed a reservation of colour and economy of form that created a more sophisticated, refined look. As for the previous five pencil drawings, the appropriation of the compositions of different devotional paintings taken primarily from the Renaissance period allowed for a direct (and explicit) link to the source material’s necessarily classical aesthetic. As a result of this visual homogeneity I had felt compelled to explore more varied styles of creating art – thus allowing for the installation of at least some form of variety in the artworks.

Additionally, the choice to explore a Pop-inspired aesthetic is something that would have created a conceptual link between the two digital pieces and the previously discussed theme of “organised religion as a capitalist system”. This would come forward to the viewer through the use of cloying colour schemes and other motifs taken from popular culture (such as the comic book aesthetic as popularised in the art world by Roy Lichtenstein). I felt this necessary as it would visually justify my borrowing of Ronald McDonald from the original drawings for his reuse as a motif in the newer pieces.

The first piece, “You Have No Culture”, analysed the disconnect that exists between what the patrons of organised religion practise and what they preach. If one considers Ronald McDonald to be a symbol of the capitalistic perversion of organised religion and Christ to be a symbol of religious idealism – then the juxtaposition of these two symbols within the same liminal space destroys the conceptual distinction between the two. This suggests that whatever has been advertised as morally advantageous has, through the endeavours of certain people, had the very fundament of its being perverted to suit the needs of its officiators before any charity or service of faith. This sentiment is emphasised through Jesus Christ’s depicted allegiance to Satan – further eliminating any qualitative differences between opposing symbols. The message conveyed by this artwork was ultimately justified by the actions of the pastor who made the video denouncing my art as it is exactly that type of malicious, petty schoolyard bullying tactic that he employed that demonstrates the superficiality of faith and the inability of even a pastor to conduct himself appropriately when confronted with provocative media (despite him supposedly preaching the teachings of a ‘forgiving’ religion).

The second drawing in the diptych dissected the symbolic morality that many religions employ as justification for their ‘teachings’. If one considers, for example, Christianity, the ideas of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are embodied physically by the characters of Christ (or a similar figure) and Satan (thus justifying the Christian belief that not only are good and evil moral constructs but physical ones as well), this



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symbolism is merely perpetuated by the tendency of religions (such as Christianity) to base their moral teachings on anecdotes that detail the most fanciful (and miraculous) imagery in which these characters are implicated. Some of these anecdotes even go so far as to justify their espoused morals by threatening the devout with eternal reward or punishment.

This is a dynamic that all people familiar with mainstream contemporary religions can recognise and (unfortunately) a dynamic through which many people have been scared (or tempted) into doing good – making basic morality transactional instead of intuitive. “Good and Evil are Mere Sex Toys for the Metaphysical” aimed to deliver my critique of this system of morality and thus highlight the error in making morality superficially incentivised. The juxtaposition of Christ and Satan (characters that, biblically, are in opposition to one another) serves to destroy any qualitative distinction between the two and highlight that they are, ultimately, fictional constructs used to justify the anecdotal instructions contained within the bible. This is supposed to provoke the viewer to contrast their own (possibly) symbolic morality with secular humanist values of doing ‘good’ simply out of common decency – calling into question the qualities and necessity of motivating one’s ethical constructs.

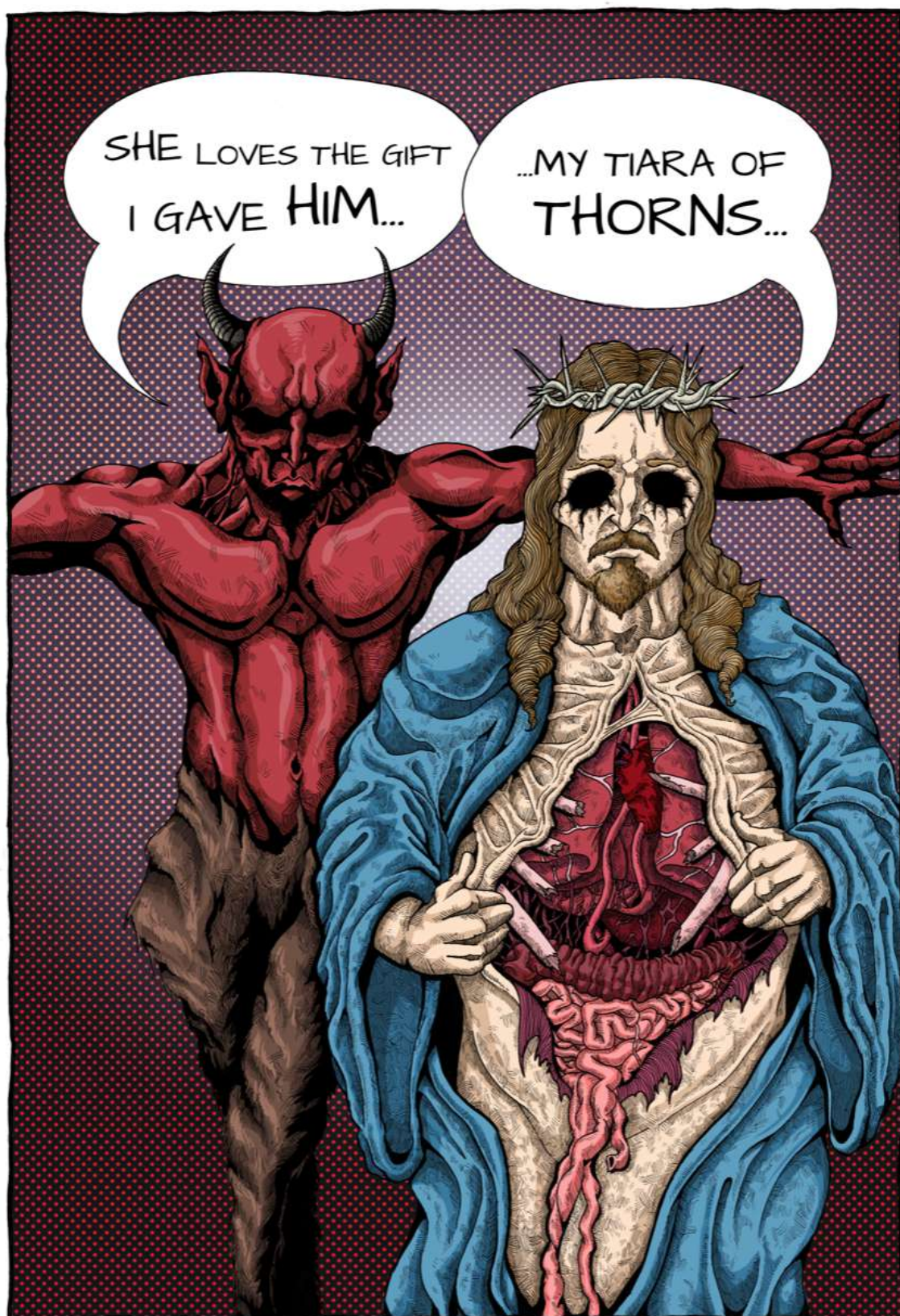
These two drawings were succeeded by a final, sculptural installation that consisted of a lamb fashioned out of pills that (at its feet) was surrounded by shredded pages of the bible as well as golden skulls partially covered with such pages. This artwork (entitled “Negative One (Faith Pill)”) served as an endpoint for the exhibition – both conceptually and visually.

Thematically speaking, the artwork conveyed two distinct messages. One of which was explicitly conveyed through the immediately apparent symbolism of the piece’s composition; however, the second constituted a more nuanced commentary on the artwork and exhibition itself (something that I referred to as ‘meta-symbolism’). The more explicit meaning of the artwork was a critique of religion as a sedative – a means by which people can escape the hardships of reality instead of dealing with their problems themselves. Additionally, this sentiment would extend itself to the ways in which people can delude themselves into justifying their own causes in the context of religion (such as how a terrorist may justify their violence in terms of a religious cause without being cognisant of some deeper insecurity that may – perhaps – be the main instigator of their behaviour).

The rather obvious means by which this sentiment was expressed in the artwork was through the manufacture of the depicted life-sized lamb out of (about 4 000) pills. This placed a symbol of Christian devotion (the lamb) in direct juxtaposition with imagery related to ideas of narcosis. The waste strewn at the base of the sculpture was supposed to be representative of the destructive influence that

religion has had on society as a result of the aforementioned, self-deluding dynamic of sedation and justification.

The second, meta-symbolic interpretation of the artwork centres itself around a reflection on the exhibition and my creative process. The sculpture itself included a number of design elements borrowed from previous artworks within the exhibition. Examples are elements such as the cloying colour scheme of the Neo-Pop pieces, as reflected in the pills used to construct the lamb, the use of gold spray-paint and bible pages to colour and texture the surface of the skulls as well as the reference to more traditional religious iconography as demonstrated through the choice of a lamb as subject matter (something that resonates with the traditional adherences of the first five pencil drawings). This conceptual unification of the exhibition (as manifested in the holistic aesthetic of “Negative One (Faith Pill)”) intended to consolidate the exhibition within a single artwork and specifically act as a symbol for the creative process implicated therein. Ultimately, the lamb was supposed to be suspended in an ambiguous space in which its continued existence was an uncertainty for the viewer. Acting as a symbol for the persecution I had seemingly overcome through



*Good and Evil are Mere Sex Toys for the Metaphysical*



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my art, the lamb’s structural uncertainty and symbolic clarity (at least to me) represented me finding myself in a much better place at the end of the exhibition than at the beginning, a place where I had finally said all that I needed to say. It was for that reason that (by the time I was finished) I had felt overwhelmingly satisfied with what I had done.

However, I recognise that the sentiment expressed by that artwork has since been disproven. There is still much that I need to say and still a dangerous entanglement with the Christian fundamentalist community that needs to be dealt with – both internally and externally, however both through art. “Negative One (Faith Pill)” no longer exists as the sculpture itself was never designed to last. Its appearance, even though satisfactory, was based upon a structure designed to last only long enough to endure a single exhibition and then be permanently dismantled. I cannot help but see the irony in the fact that the very artwork meant to represent the conclusion of my relation with Christian fundamentalism was itself predestined to expire – rendering any such conclusion moot.

I have realised that this exhibition is a mere precursor of many works to come and (by the time of writing) many works that have already been made. It is seldom you hear of people adding fuel to a fire they wish to extinguish, but Andrew Anderson (the pastor who publicly denounced my art) seems to have done exactly that. In retrospect, I realise that it was not “Negative One (Faith Pill)” that had concluded my exhibition but instead the presence of Anderson that did so – for it is exactly his actions that serve as irreversible justification of the artworks therein. It is when I reflect on that fact that I see that “Negative One (Faith Pill)” was never a true conclusion to the exhibition but rather (in unison with Anderson’s piece of performance art) simply a conjunction linking the exhibition to its successors.





## Thakirah Allie

*Thakirah, aka Zaakie, is completing an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Cape Town. She's passionate about women's rights, health and wellbeing, as well as traveling and practicing yoga. Having had previous experience in the film industry, she now only focuses on writing non-fiction, fiction and poetry, depending on what she's inspired or angered by. She is also the creator of Hey! Sexy, a multi-media platform that aims to create conversations around women's health. She is currently developing a podcast and an online store under the same name. She hopes to graduate with a manuscript for a book by the end of this year.*



# Strange Fruit

Thakirah Allie

I shared grey, ripped, leather seats with other female strangers. The sponge, half dirty, bled out from under the material of the seats and climbed into the crevices of our backs. It's uncomfortable, but you know, you make do with what the system gives you.

My face, make-up free, was covered up by a pair of sunglasses, partly to hide my sleepiness and partly to avoid any extra attention that may or may not come with the bat of some *mascara'd* eyelashes. Dressed in a black jersey, black pants and a matching handbag which was squished between my side and armpit – my outfit spoke to practicality and not self-expression. Though, in a way, perhaps I was expressing something else.

It was a hot summer's morning in April. I was taking a one-and-a-half-hour train ride into the city of Cape Town to attend a documentary class. And just like when your body jerks to the unexpected energy of a stranger who touches you, there were the unspoken rules of the train system that I had seamlessly slipped into. Sometimes, I would add my own too.

Rule number one: sit next to other females. I prefer the older ones. Many times, they'll greet you and start conversations, which may be banal to the inexperienced eye, but necessary for increasing camaraderie and your chances of feeling some sort of safety. Many of the older *tannies* that you speak to, also emanate an aura of life experience from within them. This is the type of life experience that can probably knock out anyone who tries to enter their space without good intentions.

Rule number two, if you can't find an older lady to sit next to, find other females. Chances are they won't stare at you, and if they do, it's usually because they like something you're wearing or because they'd also like to make a friend while navigating this one-and-a-half-hour train ride.

Rule number three, if you sit next to the *other* and they don't stare at you or lick their lips, consider yourself the very lucky recipient of a moment that not many of us get to experience – at least not within the eco-system of the public transport system.

Rule number four, put your shades back on, take out a book or your phone and keep yourself occupied. Looking down indicates non-interest to the world around you, and perhaps the world will mirror this non-interest back and look past you.

It's not that we don't have a good train ride if we sit next to *them*, it's just that, sometimes *they* will try to find ways that shift us out of the safety of our personal spaces, you know? The ones that we've been trying to architect for ourselves since the beginning of time.

Scraps of Table Mountain peeking through the windows let me know that we've arrived at Cape Town Train Station. Doors open; bodies move towards the exit. Now you take out your ticket and clench it in one hand while you check that your bag is zipped up and squeezed into your armpit.



Ayesha, 25



# Strange Fruit

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If you're a regular commuter, your ticket will be attached to your handbag through a key chain and covered in plastic for that extra protection.

As I walk to the exit counter and stand in the queue, a quick hand jerks into my direction, I pull away as fast as one does, when one has now become a trained soldier ready to redirect the energy of all possible enemies. But still – I was not prepared for this.

“Don't touch me!” I yell. The yelling comes from deep inside of me, a place that I don't know exists until I feel desperate for my own safety.

He responds with an unoriginal, “Do you think you're better than me huh, huh?!” The mouth of the *enemy* becomes more pronounced like a street dog when it's been threatened. Heat runs through my body, but I shift and move, and the next thing I know, I am on the other side of the ticket counter.

I got through it.

The *dog* was vile and the security guard who stood next to him, lips pressed together while slowly moving into a grin, was viler. They say silence is violence, but what do you call smiling while *viling* Satisfaction from the dissatisfaction?

As I walk to my class, I'm angry, I'm upset! And I never want this to happen again. My emotions spill into my thoughts, and I feel helpless as the questions race through my mind.

Why did nobody try to intervene? And why was the security guard just standing there with a smirk on his face?! But more importantly, when are these street and public harassments going to stop?! And who the hell do we turn to?!

Glancing back at the bright lights of the train station, I recall the *miff* smell of its platform, the reckless men who refuse to respect your space, and I decide that enough is enough. And the next time I experience these unwanted touches, these piercing echoes from their vile mouths, and their *basic* car honking, I will try to snatch it, hold it into the palms of my hands, ask it questions, enquire, turn it inside out, upside down, disseminate it, and make it known that it will no longer pierce into my orbit again.

Because my orbit was one made up completely of me: my DNA, my history, my struggles, my glitter and aspirations, and the people that I love. It wasn't made up of leering echoes from strange boys, men and even women who assume that they have a right into my personal space.

That was in 2016 and, fuelled by my anger, I set off on an ambitious journey to understand this thing called catcalling and street harassment.

I took videos. Had conversations with any and every woman or young adolescent I could find, and chatted to boys and men, alike. I spoke to people on the streets, people in my hometown, friends, family and academics alike. I consulted the internet, YouTube, and social media. All in the name of creating awareness, research and storytelling, but later on, I learnt that it had become so much more than that.



Jean-Lee, 17



# Strange Fruit

Thakirah Allie

These unwanted echoes: the noises, the kissy-kissy sounds, the hoots from the cars whilst you stand at a stop street sign (minding your own business), have always been around. They come in different shapes, sizes and textures. They are in our media and on our screens too.

This warped way in which people see us, females, and more specifically females of colour, this way in which people assume their right to stomp on our playgrounds, grope our bodies, belittle our spaces and laugh when we speak up.

These echoes are almost fabricated into our drought-ridden air by now.

“I’ve never been physically groped, but I can’t stand the noises that people make, when they see your body, any part of a women’s body exposed... it feels like a spectacle and that people can just look and comment and it’s really affected me, in terms of feeling fearful to show leg or cleavage on the streets,” Kerusha, twenty-four, tells me.

I interview her on a side street in the little area known as Harfield Village. This is how I collect most of my data, in the streets, on the sidewalks, in a train tunnelway and in my rented Claremont bedroom.

Outside of the stares of the general public, we’d also sometimes be on the receiving end of an attempted catcall too. Attempted, because I would have turned around and asserted my authority with, “Hey, we’re busy here,” or bite my lips as I wait for them to pass.

Kerusha tells me that she takes extra measures to cover herself up just in case it may draw less attention to her. But catcalling as I discover through my personal encounters and that of other’s experiences, is only in part about the clothing you wear, and more to do with the clothing wearer’s gender.

While talking to these young women, I also experimented with clothing and found that I got catcalled whether I was wearing something tight or something baggy.

In this particular instance, Kerusha is an Indian female. She’s a woman of *colour*, and she uses public transport and walks out in public, just like any of us.

I also begin to notice Kerusha’s anxiousness as she opens up about her need to protect her body from the catcalling. Later on, I realised that this feeling of anxiousness becomes synonymous with the women I speak to. The female fear, as some like to call it. This anxiousness is something I identify within myself too. The anxiousness was there that day when I was almost grabbed by my arm on the train station. It’s a sign of fight or flight, a sort of feeling that you’re in this – alone.

“I like wearing clothes that look nice on me, but I can’t do it, I couldn’t even do it this past weekend. I had to put a jeans on, literally at the train station, I came wearing my dress, and I had to put jeans on because guys kept on staring at me and making comments and looking at me up and down,” says Raylene, nineteen.



Kerusha, 24



# Strange Fruit

Thakirah Allie

But the catcalling happens whether you're in a dress or jeans. It matters only that you are female. I experienced catcalling whether I was wearing tight pants or baggy pants. But no matter what kind of catcalling it was, it was still catcalling: my space was still being invaded, boys and men alike were still trying to project their ideas of what they think I am onto me. And these interactions are always dripped in a sense of fear.

"This, when I'm walking down the street, and I'm going where I need to be, and a guy would shout or say, 'Hey *girlie*,' and it annoys me so much because what the fuck is a *girlie*?" Ayesha, twenty-five, goes on to say. "I mean, I'm not a *girlie*," she concludes.

The sweet echoes of harassment can happen in other ways too.

About a year of this nonsensical and yet, simultaneously frightening experience, she found out that he was the caretaker of the building she had been living in.

When a taxi *gaartjie* called, Khanyi, twenty-four, "Hey Nana," it made her feel *dirty* because this is a word that her family, including her grandmother, would call her by. Thereby, alienating the sacredness of her family life that was linked to her by this word and replacing it by an energy of warped objectification.

"You're not sure what's gonna happen, and that scares you, the fact that you can't even walk to a shop, what is just a few blocks away from your house," says seventeen-year-old, Jean-Lee, who resides in Paarl and who knows a thing or two about talking back to these men.

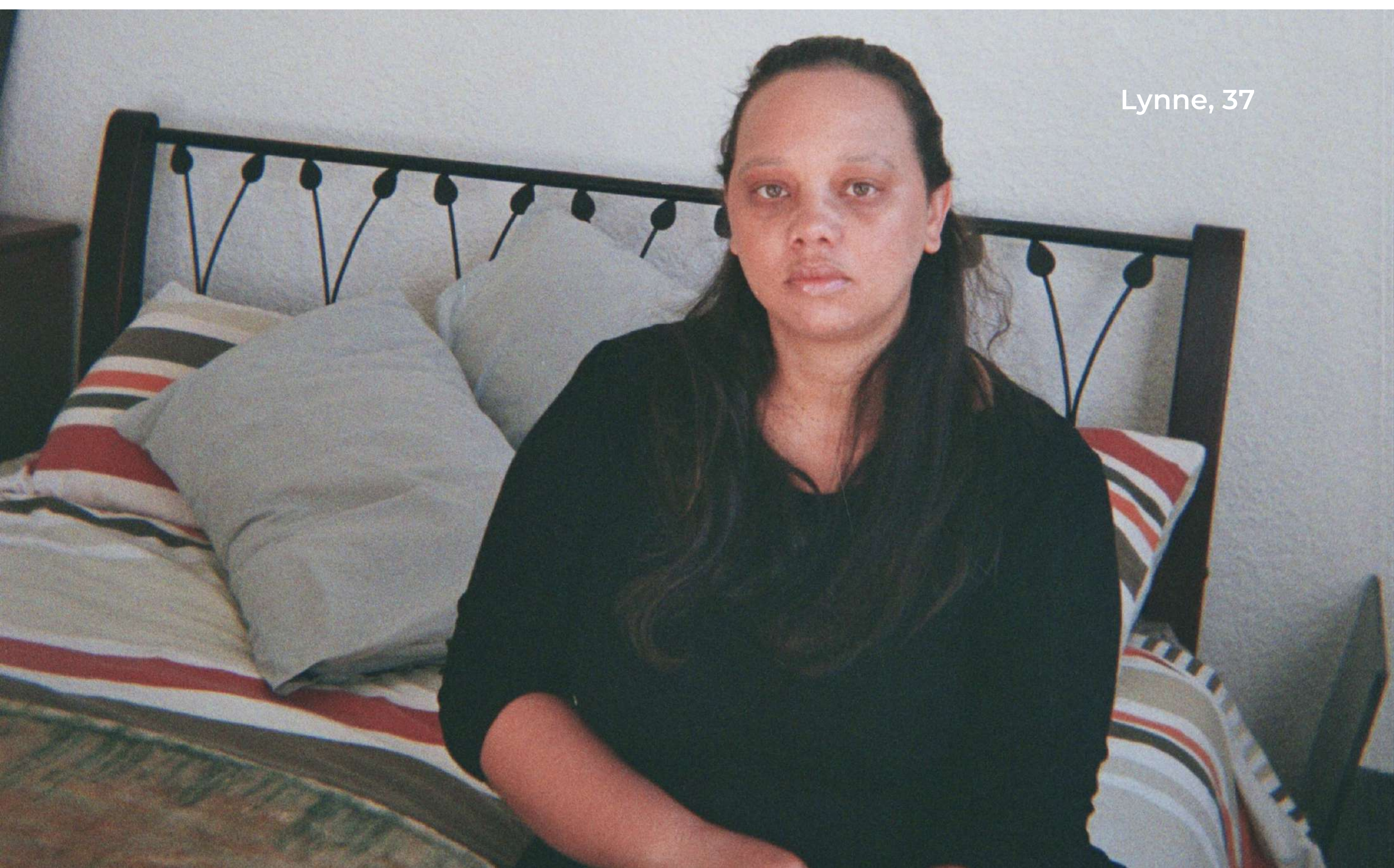
Harassment is constant and is happening in many different ways. But they are all bogged down in this theme of ownership over a female's space.

Kharnita Mohamed, a lecturer in social anthropology at the University of Cape Town, tells me that harassment isn't necessarily about the woman or the girl but rather about the man or boy wanting ownership over her space and claiming it as his.

This 'ownership' serves to be the cake which men are eating from. This perceived ownership is what makes them come into you – a stranger's space– and gives them permission to tell you who you are, or what they would like to do to you, based on what they think you are, based on what's between your legs.

This 'ownership' shape-shifts and this 'ownership' can also be those unwanted comments on your social media pages, telling you that you're "beautiful" on each of your posts and then quickly changing it to "suck a dick", when you ask said 'ownership' to back off.

Acts of harassment are like recycling an old narrative and polluting it back into our eco-systems. The Annual South African Police Report of 2017/18 let us know that "assault, rape and other sexual abuse are the most common crimes against women and children." And, with a constant flow of these stories within our media, how are girls and women supposed to feel navigating these spaces?





# Strange Fruit

Thakirah Allie

The leering echoes are still around to pierce a different girl's orbit in a different way.

They could come from you, your brother or your father and yet the only gender who's still being made to look in the mirror are women. Imagine waking up to newspapers and magazines sending you alerts of how to be the 'it' girl. Imagine, the television showing you how to dress and talk. Imagine, your boyfriend telling you he doesn't like it when you wear that skirt, or your mum reminding you to shave your armpits and to be a 'lady'. Imagine you wear the skirt, you walk down the road, and the echoes come after you, just like the newspapers and the magazines and the television. And then you go back home, and you tell your boyfriend and your mother, and they say "I told you so" or "ignore them" and give you advice on how to re-arrange yourself again, your body, your hair, your clothing.

Imagine, creating a society where women are chopping and changing themselves, tilting their own self-autonomy and injuring their mind with more anxiety because of a society who refuses to see the worth in protecting them, and then who "*I told you so's*" them for standing up for themselves.

What kind of society are you creating then?

These questions don't even need to be asked, because we've already created this society. So as a woman or a young girl, who's really on your side?

When I asked a group of young boys on the streets of Cape Town if they've ever catcalled before, they said yes but that they thought it was a compliment or that it makes the woman feel sexier. And when I let them know that some women don't like it, the boys said they weren't aware of this and will try to not do it again. These were young boys, teenagers, their responses, probably more reserved by the camera I had in my hands. But these were boys willing to listen – be it only for five minutes.

When I tried to ask older men the same question, many became defensive and some even aggressive. One man admitted that he knew it was wrong from the constant complaints his female friends gave him and that he only did it when he was younger.

Once, as I was walking home, a security guard in the neighbourhood I was living in kept greeting me in a way where I could feel the *thirst* of his tongue, his eyes staring at me up and down with every greeting, and them always lingering longer than they should; I politely asked him to not greet me in that way again.

Suddenly, the *wild dog energy* came out, "Who the fuck do you think you are?! I know everybody in this neighbourhood; if something happens to you, who's going to protect you?" was his response.

I feared walking down my street for a few days after that.

Then on a weekday mid-afternoon, a group of construction workers tried to grope my arms and legs, while laughing and calling me a "*poes*", as I tried to protect my body. It was in full view of a sea full of



Raylene, 19



# Strange Fruit

Thakirah Allie

traffic. Nobody stopped their car. Nobody did anything. Men, women alike, turned their face back to where they were heading.

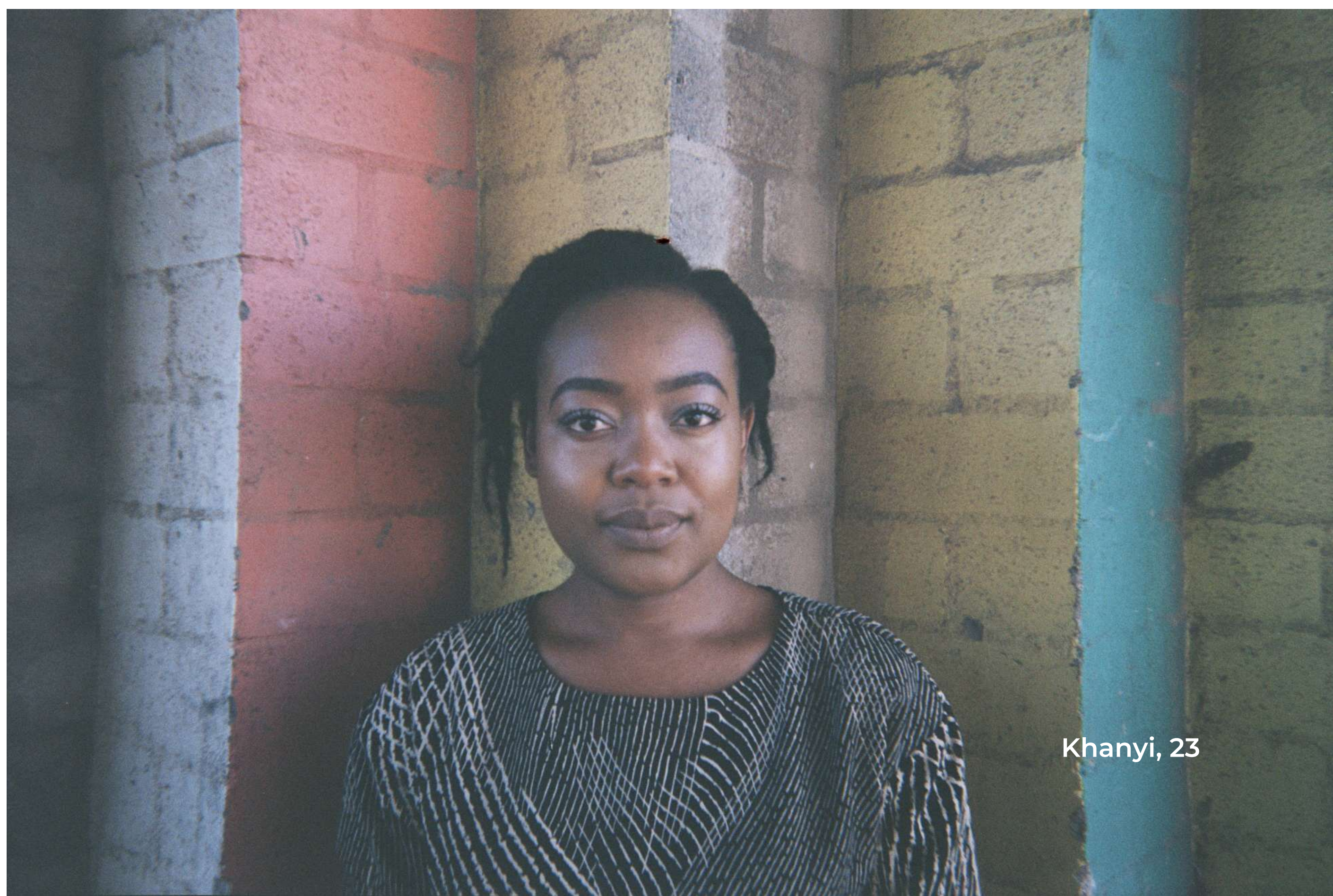
I was a few minutes away from my house, and as I walked, humiliated and frightened, I broke down in tears. I then saw another group of construction workers working on a pavement site, I charged towards them, angry, and out of breath. Struggling to push a few words from my mouth, I let them know what had just transpired and demanded the details of whoever was in charge.

The man who came forward to speak to me was adamant that the boys or men, or whatever they claim to be, were not his workers, that his workers are extremely learned in the ways of how not to harass women. He wasn't the owner of the business and gave me a *higher up's* email to contact. I never contacted the company. When I got home, I made a video about the experience, put it online, and later cried myself to sleep. I just wanted the experience to be over with. I didn't go out of the house for a few days after that, and eventually, I decided to move out of Cape Town.

Every time I experienced the *echo*, it would twist and twirl through my body just adding to the collective narrative of the hate, the disrespect, the objectification and control a female body – a female body belonging to a woman of *colour*. My body. The bodies of all the women I have spoken to. The bodies of all the women who have experienced this.

I didn't feel good every time they leered at me with their intrusive eyes, or every time they hooted at me from their fancy and not-so-fancy cars. I didn't like standing at the robots: sometimes they'd wait for you to notice them and wink at you before they drive off to their homes, their works or to pick their children up from school.

The echoes, it seems, is all around us. Sometimes it'll be a scream, a tug, a touch or worse. Either way, the trauma from these experiences will just be another lived reality that nobody wants to be accountable for. Street harassment is an accepted and public form of on-going trauma. It's everywhere and comes in many different colours, shapes and textures – reminding you that your personal space struggles to be your own, that the streets weren't really built with females in mind.



Khanyi, 23



THE JOURNAL OF AFRICAN YOUTH LITERATURE



# Plays





## Bandile Nkosi

*Bandile Onamandla Nkosi was born in May 2003 and grew up in Ladysmith, KwaZulu-Natal, with his grandmother and five siblings. In 2017, he moved to Pretoria to live with his mum and other two siblings. He attended high school there, but this year (2020) moved back to KwaZulu-Natal. Bandile reveals, 'As a teenager, I have faced many problems and having to bury my childhood best friend really took a lot out of me. These couple of years in Pretoria really taught me some lessons and maybe it was just what I needed to clear my mind and get myself together.'*

*As a youth, Bandile felt pressured to become a doctor, but he discovered an aptitude for authorship which he wants to share with the world. And, 'most importantly,' he says, 'I want to make my family proud.' Bandile wants to be a playwright or scriptwriter because he loves telling stories in this genre.*

# Yenz’okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

## Note on the text

One of our goals at Jay Lit is to preserve African youths’ language and ways of communicating in the form they are used today. We are thus very proud to present the urban youth voices in this dramatic tale. The play is written mostly in isiZulu and also features a slang form of Tswana called sePitori, as well as Xitsonga and English. SePitori is a popular urban language spoken in Pretoria and the Tshwane metropolitan area in Gauteng, South Africa. It is a combination of Tswana influenced by Tsotsitaal, Afrikaans and other black South African languages. Even if you have little grasp of these languages, you will still be able to follow much of this story, and it will doubtless touch you deeply.

## Overview

After his father’s death, a young boy named Yenz’okuhle (Yenzi) from KwaZulu-Natal comes to Pretoria to live with his loving and caring mother. He gets introduced to the ghetto life and his love for money makes it difficult for him to find a way out of a gambling addiction.

## Characters

*Yenzi* – main character

*Rhulani, Dipalesa* – friends of Yenzi

*CJ, Knoxman, Lethabo, BT, BIG* – gang members

*Roseline* – Yenzi’s mother

*Angelina* – Dipalesa’s mother

*Policeman 1, Policeman 2*



# Yenz’okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

## Act 1 Scene 1

*The streets of Pretoria.*

*Yenzi and his friend Rhulani are on their way home. On the way, they see Yenzi’s crush Dipalesa.*

Rhulani: Eh Boy, bona bona!

Yenzi: Sshh ngiyazi ngimubonile.

Rhulani: Gcwala ngaye nja yami.

Yenzi: Aowa mfethu ngizofika dar ngithini.

Rhulani: Hebana! Ubuza mina.

Yenzi: Kusho ubani ukuthi ngigcwale ngaye?

Rhulani: Kodwa uyicrush kabani?

Yenzi: ai asiyeke

Rhulani: [*Laughs*] Boy, ungangitsheli ukuthi unegwababa njayami.

Yenzi: No bruh, anginayo igwababa, besides akasiyo itype yami.

Rhulani: Mawusho njalo keh bra wami.

Yenzi: [*Unsure*] Yeah.

## Act 1 Scene 2

*Yenzi and Rhulani pass boys playing dice.*

Yenzi: Eish bru, yazi sengiyazisola.

Rhulani: About?

Yenzi: Palesa...

Rhulani: Uyibhari san.

Yenzi: Why usho njalo?

*CJ calls them.*

CJ: Eh bafethu...

Rhulani: [*Talking softly to Yenzi*] Ufunanike lo.

Yenzi: Wena unenkinga naye wonke umuntu.

*CJ runs towards them.*

CJ: Sho bafethu.

Rhulani and Yenzi: Sho sho.

CJ: Sho, eish bafethu kgopela lentlatse ka jakete.

Rhulani: Eish, harde bra yami mina angina nex.

CJ: Ahh, Zulu boy oskang kgawatha.

Yenzi: Ah, mfethu mina ngiphethe imali ehlangene.

# Yenz’okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

CJ: Khululeka ntsha game, I’m sure Knoxman uthwere change.

*CJ calls Knoxman.*

CJ: Eh Knoxman, kgopela change dar.

Knoxman: Onyaka change yabo kay bra yaka?

CJ: [*Talking to Yenzi*] Othwere bokay?

Yenzi: R200.

CJ: [*Talking to Knoxman*] Ya, 2 klipa dar.

Knoxman: Emonna change emofatsi mo.

CJ: Ya Zulu boy, asivaye otlon setisa dar, otloe kriya change ya gago.

Yenzi: Asivaye Rex.

Rhulani: Aii ngeke boy vaya uyi one dar mina angizingeni.

CJ: Ah Rhulani, mfethu oskang kgawatha jo re tsena sgela bobotlhe ke tlo le shebela one day.

Yenzi: Ya boy, besides asiyile ukuyohlala as soon as ngithola ichange siyavaya.

CJ: Mo tlogela mfethu Yenzi hhanyaki.

Yenzi: Ah boy, ngivaya naye so ah never ngimushiye ayi one. Ngiyakucela mfethu Rex ntwana yami.

Rhulani: Ok, asivaye ke.

## Act 1 Scene 3

Lethabo: Bafethu ten set.

*Lethabo’s opponent makes a krab.*

Lethabo: Haha, malambane uvukile! Dankie, Zulu boy.

*As Yenzi plays he loses.*

Yenzi: Eh CJ, mfethu ngigaye imali yami ngizovaya.

CJ: Sho sho Zulu boy ere ke catche mo than keofa zakao.

Rhulami: Ai mina boy uzongithola ngendlela.

Yenzi: Ah mfethu CJ yabona mfethu kmele ngivaye. Eh Rex, rhulani mfethu ungangishiyi.

Rhulani: Ngizozvaya kancane.

*CJ keeps on playing and Rhulani leaves.*

Yenzi: Ah mfethu yabona urex seka vayile mfethu.

CJ: Kgoluleka ntshaka yabona mo ke sign ya gore ka tsheko ke lucky day yagago tshwara mo. [*He gives Yenzi dice.*]

Yenzi: Ngiwenzeni ama dayisi.

CJ: Shapa ma dice Zulu boy ke tlo beletsa.



# Yenz’okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

Yenzi: Angikwazi ukudlala ama dice mfethu, futhi angizelanga wona. Ngigaye imali yami ngivaye.

CJ: Yirela nna fela mfethu so that otlo kreya change ya gago ovaye.

*Yenzi throws the dice and hits a seven.*

Gang: Ah mfano waja.

CJ: Ba bethe Zulu empethele 14 downs fela than wavaya.

*Yenzi hits a seven again.*

CJ: Choco set, choco set.

*Someone bets R20.*

CJ: Choco set one man oyile.

*Two hours later... They are still playing dice and Yenzi is winning.*

CJ: Ah Knoxman, aona motho osetang somar ke game bar.

Knoxman: Yah mfethu, enzame ka 50 jakete dar.

*Everyone is asking for money from Yenzi and CJ. Dipalesa passes by.*

CJ: [*Teasing Dipalesa*] Eh bafetho stoko.

*The gang cheers and whistles.*

Knoxman: Eh sweet ma lovey, aonyaki ke go fleets?

Dipalesa: Ompona ke desperate?

Gang: Ohhhhh!

*Yenzi smiles.*

Knoxman: [*Embarrassed and angry*] Ahhh hey exe wena oskatlo ntlwayela bline, nna nka becha family yagago yoyotle.

Dipalesa: [*Smiles*] Kang? Katshelete yako ma dicing? Sies le bare arena tshelete mara we are not desperate. Babangwe mo barata dilo playing dice doesn’t even suit them.

*Yenzi shows guilt.*

Knoxman: Ey wena sefebe, wena awitsi batho neh, bolela matshila hape nna ke tlo go...

# Yenz'okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

Dipalesa: Otloyirang???

*Knoxman goes to her and tries to slap her but Yenzi holds his hand.*

Knoxman: Zulu boy oyirang? Entlogela man ke shape di kente.

Yenzi: Ejo, why kumele ushaye intombazana, muyekele avaye?

Knoxman: Oskatlo mpotsa nwana wena san, kao shapa seven downs nyana onahana gore osleme, seven ke skeleme ntsha yaka,oskatlo protecta panty over majita. Etswa dar smallo.

Yenzi: Uzoyenzani Jo?

*CJ comes running trying to prevent the fight.*

CJ: NO MAN, Yenzi vaya mfethu, tsiya zakao ovaye ntsha yaka!

Yenzi: Ima kancane CJ, ngithe wena uzoyenzani mfethu.

Knoxman: [*Laughing*] Ej CJ kgawula empya nyana ya ga go ke nna top dog mo. Meno aka aroba marapo ke gcwala kanombolo 2 madoda'mhlophe 6.

Gang: YES NANGEMPELA.

Knoxman: Suka emabhozeni small otlo gobala.

Yenzi: Ungangibizi injama mina ngoba angikokothi njengawe mina nguXamu ongathuswa oshobishobi, ungakhohla phela ukuthi angikusabi. [*Yenzi spits on Knoxman.*]

*Dipalesa smiles. But Knoxman and his gang attack Yenzi leaving him brutalised. One of the gang members holds Dipalesa back from trying to intervene.*

Knoxman: Go swim with the fishes san lana kuruler ama 26. [*He makes a sign.*]

Gang: Yes nangempela.

Knoxman: We out.

*CJ looks at Yenzi then also leaves with the gang.*

## Act 1 Scene 4

*While Yenzi is lying down, Dipalesa comes to comfort him.*

Dipalesa: Yohh, I'm so sorry. I'm really really sorry.

Yenzi: For ini.

Dipalesa: This is all my fault, like seriously, if it wasn't for me and my big you wouldn't be...

Yenzi puts his finger on her mouth.

Yenzi: Shhh, cela ungazi blami, akuyona ifault yakho.

Dipalesa: [*Flirting*] The name is Dipalesa.



# Yenz'okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

Yenzi: I know...

*They look straight at each other's eyes.*

Dipalesa: Good.

*They draw closer to each other and kiss.*

Yenzi: [*He speaks with a soft voice*] Now help me get up.

Dipalesa: [Snaps out of her dreamy state] Oh yeah, yeah sorry.

*Dipalesa helps Yenzi get up and they stare at each other.*

Dipalesa: It's getting late, I gotta go.

Yenzi: Yeah...

*Dipalesa leaves and Yenzi keeps staring after her.*

## Act 2 Scene 1

*Yenzi's bedroom. Yenzi can't stop thinking about Dipalesa. Yenzi's mom enters the room.*

Roseline: Yenzi... [*In seTswana*] Haw what happened in your eye?

Yenzi: Ngishatekile esikoleni ngidlala icricket.

Roseline: Oh okay... Get ready we have visitors coming.

Yenzi: Mmh that is why kunuka kamnandi so.

Roseline: Yep.

Yenzi: Eish ma, can I call uRhulani, coz uyazi ngizobhoreka masekukhona abantu?

Roseline: Tsamaya mara oyire kapila kaore betla eskgale. DON'T BE LATE!

Yenzi: [*Gets off his bed to call Rhulani*] Ok cool.

## Act 2 Scene 2

*The sitting room. Knock at the door.*

Roseline: I'm coming.

*The door opens and the guests come in.*

Roseline: Heyyyy.

Angelina [*Dipalesa's mom*]: Hello chomi!!

Roseline: Osharpo mara.

Angelina: Eya ke sharp wena!

Roseline: Ke tlo reng ke sharp. [*Greeting Dipalesa*] Hello nana.

# Yenz’okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

Dipalesa: Heyy.

Roseline: Obyang?

Dipalesa: Ke sharp.

Roseline: Okay you guys are welcome, yall can come in.

## Act 2 Scene 3

Angelina: *[Sitting in the dining room]* Aw waitse, I was expecting to see Yenz’okuhle kante okae?

Roseline: Oyilo bitsa chomi ya gae kaore, “He doesn’t wanna get bored.”

Angelina: Ba byao banaba today, le o na nyaka ota le chomi yagae mara I refused.

Roseline: Do you want something to drink?

Angelina: Yes please, kgopela juice.

*Dipalesa is busy on her phone.*

Angelina: Dipalesa, something to drink?

Dipalesa: Nop.

*The door opens. Yenzi and Rhulani come in laughing.*

Roseline: I’m pretty sure it’s them.

*Yenzi and Rhulani are shocked to see that Dipalesa is also in the house.*

Roseline: Oh good le fitlhile.

Yenzi: *[Staring at Dipalesa]* Ya...

Roseline: Yamitsi Angelina anker?

Yenzi: Yah, yah sanbona.

Angelina: Yoh Yenz’okuhle...

Yenzi: Yebo...

Angelina: Ogodile yoh! The last time I saw you, you were four, five years.

Yenzi: Haha.

Angelina: *[Pointing at Dipalesa]* Etna ke go introduce, oe ke step daughter saka Dipalesa, Palesa oe ke Yenz’okuhle.

*They shake hands.*

Yenzi: Ngiyajabula ukubonana nawe futhi.

Roseline: Eh kanti sile labonana kai.

Dipalesa: Oh, re tsena skolo sesi one.

Roseline: Ohhh okay.



# Yenz’okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

*Rhulani clears his throat.*

Roseline: Ohh, this is Yenzi’s friend, Rhulani.

Rhulani: Mara bangibiza u’Rex.

Angelina: Oh nice to meet you Rex, nna ke nna Angelina.

Dipalesa: Ummm... can I use the bathroom?

Roseline: Yeah sure, Yenzi mo bontse.

## Act 2 Scene 4

*Later on...*

Angelina: Yohh! Chomi, thank you for the food, it was so nice, mara ke nako ya rena yao tsamaya.

Roseline: Ya neh, anyways it was nice having ya’ll. Hope we’ll see you guys next time.

Angelina: Yenzi oska stressa mama neh.

Yenzi: Yebo, Dipalesa. Hope I’ll see you around.

Dipalesa: Yeah you will. *[She takes a pen from the table, she writes her number on Yenzi’s arm, and then she leaves.]*

## Act 3 Scene 1

*Yenzi’s bedroom. He is still sleeping.*

Roseline: Yenzi...Yenzi...Yenz’okuhle!

Yenzi: *[Wakes up]* Ma!

Roseline: Kea merekong, otsiye tshelete modem’a room divider oreke mabone le borotho.

Yenzi: Okay.

## Act 3 Scene 2

*Rhulani’s house. Yenzi shouting by the gate.*

Yenzi: eRex... eRex... Rhulani!

Rhulani: *[He comes out wearing pyjamas]* Ah no man,

Yenzi. Why ungivusa early so nja yami?

Yenzi: Gqhoka icathula sivaye.

Rhulani: Heeeh, sivaya siyaphi?

Yenzi: Siya estolo dar.

Rhulani: *[Xitsonga]* Ndza kha ndza ta.

## Act 3 Scene 3

*Yenzi and Rhulani are on their way to the shop. On the way, they see the gambling boys again. Yenzi looks at Rhulani.*

# Yenz’okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

Rhulani: Ah no mfana ungayi dar.

Yenzi: Aii khululeka mfana, ngizodlala ngale ten yami if I lose siyavaya.

Rhulani: Mmh okay, ungathi angikutshelanga ker.

*Yenzi goes and plays.*

Knoxman: Yaaaa, ashi schayi saka sifitlhile, ke tshepa gore ontsitse sinyama.

Yenzi: [*Holding the dice in his hands*] Khululeka Knox, ngizoshaya nine downs.

BT: Ahh hai, oe wa claimer kemobone fela, etlang ke le thwarele yena.

*Yenzi throws the dice and hits 11.*

BT: Ahh speed se fedile papa, 20 set.

Knoxman: 20 set, one man oyile. Ke bech, shapa ma dice Zulu boy.

*Yenzi plays and hits a random number.*

BIG: Apen?

BT: Ke dilo tsaka, BIG etswa dar.

*Yenzi loses after buying an apen.*

BT: Danki, akare kele boditse gore speed se fedile.

Rhulani: Aii Yenzi asivaye, nawe uyabona akwenzakali la.

Yenzi: Ima kancane mfethu, mina niyadliwa wena ubusy ungibalisela ngokuhamba, aii hamba man.

*Rhulani leaves and Yenzi carries on playing.*

## Act 4 Scene 1

*Roseline comes home and the house is dark.*

Roseline: Yenzi! Yenz’okuhle! [*Wondering*] ’Hebanna kganti ngwano okae.

*Yenzi comes back home crying.*

Roseline: Yenzi! Hebanna otlha kae, and why are you crying?

Yenzi: Ke tlha shopong

Roseline: So why are you crying?

Yenzi: Bangibambe inkunzi.

Roseline: ’bakubambe inkunzi’ ko kae?



# Yenz’okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

*Yenzi cries out loud and she comforts him.*

Roseline: Thula oska’la, at least abao gobatsa.

## Act 4 Act 2

*Roseline’s bedroom. Roseline thinks about what has been happening to Yenzi. She kneels down, starts praying and crying.*

## Act 5 Scene 1

*The next day Roseline is watching TV and Yenzi comes to her.*

Yenzi: Haw ma today awuyanga emsebenzini

Roseline: Mmh, ke off.

Yenzi: Oh okay, sacela ungiphe imali ye airtime.

Roseline: Aii othomile.

Yenzi: Ahh ma, kea go kgopela.

Roseline: Aii, tsamay ’otsiya wallet ’aka under my pillow.

*Yenzi runs to get the wallet.*

Roseline: Tsiya [Giving him R50] Ke nyaka change yaka.

Yenzi: Okay. [He runs out the house.]

Roseline: Byanong oya kae?

Yenzi: Ko reka airtime.

Roseline: [Jokingly] Onkare bakao thwara pogo hape hape.

*Yenzi goes back to play dice.*

## Act 6 Scene 1

Yenzi: Ekse majita

*The gang greets him back and they start playing. Yenzi loses all the money and he thinks of stealing his mother’s money that he saw in the wallet.*

## Act 6 Scene 2

*Yenzi runs to his house and bumps into Dipalesa and Rhulani.*

Rhulani: Hebana Yenzi, uthi zkhiphani njayami, why ugijima kangaka?

Yenzi: [Disgusted] Nxxai fokof wena.

# Yenz'okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

Dipalesa: Eh Yenzi, osharp?

Yenzi: Akuyona inkinga yakho leyo, enlek yazini mina nawe asazani so why unendaba?

*He runs to his house, steals his mother's money and then goes back to the dice.*

## Act 7 Scene 1

BT: Hebana obuyile?

Yenzi: Yah umalambane uvukile.

CJ: Othwere bo kae mfanaka ke go thuse?

Yenzi: Ke thwere tshelete eyintshi thata le kas'luke.

BIG: Dankie SBV.

BT: Eh di man orata ma dice too much.

CJ: Yah di man orata ma dice aseng zaka.

BT: That is why di'mo tlapela so.

Knoxman: Ah hey tlogelang se chayi saka tuh.

*They start playing than the police van stops. They all try to run away but a police officer pulls out a gun.*

Policeman 1: *[With a gun in his hands]* Don't even you dare otherwise I'll pull the trigger.

Policeman 2: Sies man, le dlala ma dice le banyane so! Ah detective ba thwantse rebathwere, voetsek everyone down!

BIG: Re kgopela thwarelo re kas'dlale hape.

Policeman 1: Aii voetsek wena eya mofatsi, ebele entsang everything eley thwareng leyi beye modem'a board.

*Everyone takes out everything they have and throws it on top of the dice board. Yenzi looks at the money and he comes up with an idea.*

Policeman 2: Eh detective bona tshelete emofatsi im sure it's close to 2000. That is why ba feyila so, I wonder ba tswadi babona ba reng. So talk Knoxman ke mang?

*They point at Knoxman and the policemen laugh.*

Policeman 1: Hebana ke yena oe.

*Yenzi grabs all the money and runs away.*

Policeman 2: Hey wena oya kae.

*He fires a warning shot but Yenzi keeps running so he chases him. Yenzi runs to his house.*



# Yenz'okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

## Act 7 Scene 2

*Policeman 2 asks around for Yenzi. He sees Dipalesa and asks if she has seen Yenzi and she shows the detective the place Yenzi ran away to.*

## Act 7 Scene 3

*Inside the house.*

Roseline: Hebanna... and then?

Yenzi: Ah no bengizigijimela nje noRex

Roseline: Oh ok, mara Rhulani otlile mo anyakani l'wena.

Yenzi: Yah angan ogcin'engitholile.

Roseline: Mmh...

*A knock on the door. Yenzi is scared.*

Yenzi: Is ma, if gonale motho onyakang, please tell them I'm not here.

Roselie: Ok, mara checka gore ke mang omo mnyakong

*A second knock on the door.*

Yenzi: *[He quickly goes to his bedroom.]* Otlo checka.

*A third knock on the door.*

Roseline: Ke mang?

Policeman 2: Ke Detective Tau.

Roseline: *[Talking to herself on her way to open the door]* Detective!?! *[She opens the door].*

Policeman 2: Dumelang.

Roseline: Ahee, ke kago thusa kang detective.

Policeman 2: Ke nyakana le moshimane *[Gives a full description]* baitse bare otsenile kamo.

Roseline: Aowa, gotsenile ngwan'aka fela mo ntlong.

Policeman 2: Uhmm can you call him maybe akan'thusa?

Roseline: Yenzi!

*Yenzi is scared and doesn't know what to do. He starts to think of a plan.*

Roseline: Yenzi!! *[She waits a little.]* Aowa Yenz'okuhle kea go bitsa man!! You know what detective let me go and call him, nkyemele gona mo.

*When she gets inside Yenzi's room, she sees him trying to escape through the window.*

# Yenz'okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

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# Yenz'okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

Roseline: Oerang?

Yenzi: *[Nervous]* Ai lutho ngiwise ifoni yami ngaphandle.

Roseline: Ashi fone yagao modim'atafula!

Yenzi: Oh eish, I didn't see it.

Roseline: Well then areye gonale motho o'nyakang.

Yenzi: Ke mang?

Roseline: Areye otlo mobona onyaka thuso yagao fela.

*She grabs Yenzi's hand and takes him to the door. As soon as Yenzi sees the police, he tries running away, but the police catch him and call the other police with the other gamblers. After a while, they all come together and the police wants to punish them for gambling.*

Policeman 2: Yaahh, ka tsheko we are going to teach you a listen in front of your family and friends we want to make an example out of y'all.

## Act 8 Scene 1

*Dipalesa runs to Yenzi's mum.*

Dipalesa: *[Calling for Roseline]* Mama Yenzi, ma!

*Roseline sees Dipalesa.*

Dipalesa: Mama Yenzi maphorisa athwere Yenzi and banyak'ompetha, etla otlo mothusa!

Roseline: *[Showing no emotions]* Oska'mpotsa ka Yenz'okuhle.

Dipalesa: But he's your chid!

Roseline: I don't have a child.

Dipalesa: Kea go kgopela, tsamay'omthusa!

Roseline: Dipalesa, go home.

Dipalesa: Please ma, what if they kill him?

Roseline: I said get out! *[She starts crying.]*

*Dipalesa leaves as Roseline cries on the floor.*

## Act 8 Scene 2

Policeman 1: Bolelang why were you gambling?

*They are all quiet.*

Policeman 1: Answer the damn question, Knoxman ke mang?

# Yenz'okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

*They all point at Knoxman.*

Policeman 2: Stand Knoxman.

Knoxman: [*Stands up*] Aowa asena Knoxman.

Policeman 2: Voetsek! Did I say you must talk?

*Knoxman stands in silence.*

Policeman 2: Heyy wena san entebele mo matlong he'ke bolela l'wena did I say you must talk!? [*He slaps Knoxman and then asks*] Oho so kena stlayela ke bolela keyi one?

*Knoxman shakes his head.*

Policeman 2: [*Slaps him again*] How am I suppose to know what you are saying!?

*Knoxman starts crying.*

Policeman 2: [*Slaps him again*] I didn't say cry.

*Knoxman tries to hide his crying.*

Policeman 1: [*Laughs*] Ay man detective that's enough. So kenako yago bua. So ore kwena Knoxman?

Knoxman: Aowa bayaka asena Knoxman.

Policeman 1: [*Slaps him*] Oskatlo mpotsa maka!

Knoxman: [*Crying*] Akeo botsi maka asena Knoxman.

Policeman 1: Than ke mang?

Knoxman: Aketsi lena ke fets'okopana lebona, maybe Knoxman ke mfan'ola wamu Zulu.

Yenzi: Ungazongidakelwa wena! Eh uncle uye lona uKnoxman.

Policeman 2: [*Slaps Yenzi*] Voetsek wena didimala ke mang otse ari bolela? Ai detective bana'ba ah never bare botse niti, tshwantse reba. Phanishe bobotlhe.

Policeman 1: Ya you are right, ankere luna letsi ma dice so wena retlo le betha seven each thoma ka wena Knoxman. Wena Zulu boy nomlomo omanzi, khipha ibhande lapho.

Yenzi: Angilifanga.

*The detective searches everyone for belts and takes one from CJ. They all get beaten up and Yenzi's mum is looking at the window while they are beating her son. After the police left Rhulani and Dipalesa carry Yenzi to the house and Yenzi sees his ashamed mother, he is embarrassed to talk to her so he just go to the bedroom.*

## Act 8 Scene 3

*Roseline kneels down and prays for her son. Yenzi overhears her.*



# Yenz'okuhle

Bandile Nkosi

Roseline: Father, Lord, I have been your servant ever since, I was in your lane so why are you punishing me? You first took my husband and now you want to take my son away. I've been praying everyday but I never get a chance to get my blessings. What have I done lord answer me what? All I'm asking from you is to save my son, save him. I will do anything. Just take me instead, but please save Yenz'okuhle!

*[She starts crying.]*

*After she cries for a short while, she decides to go check up on Yenzi, but she finds him dead as he has committed suicide.*



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# The Journal of African Youth Literature

## PRESERVING AFRICAN YOUTH IDENTITIES

The Journal of African Youth Literature (JAY Lit) is a non-profit initiative providing African youths with a platform to publish their writing. We also publish writing by other individuals that falls under the general theme of African Youth. We want to publish creative writing from across the African continent from Algeria to Zambia, and in all African languages from Amharic to Zulu and everything in between! Submissions for the second issue open on 1 February 2020. Please consult the author guidelines on the website carefully before sending your creative writing.

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